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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"Aubrey Beardsley's Salomé : A Commentary on the Changing Status of Sexuality in Late Victorian England"

BY

Sara Jennifer Abbott

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

in

HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring 1993

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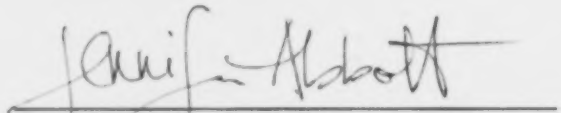

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Date: December 10, 1992

THESIS ABSTRACT

A discussion of the illustrations produced by Aubrey Beardsley in 1894 for Oscar Wilde's English version of Salomé should go beyond a formal analysis of the images' suppressed, censored or hidden erotic details. This historical inquiry departs from the rather limited nature of previous investigations, by considering other issues vital to the production of Beardsley's drawings for Salomé. First, I consider the appearance and function of Salomé as a prominent theme in many literary and visual works in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Next, I look at the ways in which the popular press affected Beardsley's illustrations which should be seen, at least in part, as products of the late nineteenth century communicational media. In this respect, the Salomé drawings are bound up with the idea of the New Woman as she was defined in popular literature as well as in images from advertisements and posters. The issues of sexuality and censorship will be considered as they relate to Beardsley's role as a critic of the prevailing sexual mores and ideals of the late Victorian period. Finally, the thesis will explore how the images work together as a set.

My premise throughout is that Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé were intended to function as critiques of Victorian society by drawing attention to shifting definitions of sexuality as seen in various literary and visual representations from the period. Each chapter will take up the theme of (female) sexuality in order to clarify how women were viewed in the 1890s, particularly from Beardsley's perspective. From the image of the New Woman in the press to myths surrounding gender roles and forms of sexual expression, Beardsley rarely neglected an opportunity to comment upon the most controversial issues of the day in his illustrations for Salomé.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SUPPRESSED IMAGES: INTRODUCTION

On the ninth of February, 1894, the English version of Oscar Wilde's Salomé was presented to the Victorian public, and from that time to the present it has rarely been free from criticism. The text of Wilde's play was accompanied by a set of images created by the twenty year old artist, Aubrey Beardsley, who was just beginning to secure a reputation as a black-and-white illustrator. Beyond functioning as illustrations for Salomé, however, the images themselves were quite shockingly designed. As a consequence they were marginalized by art critics who relegated them to the peripheral regions of art historical discourse largely because of the fact that both the play and Beardsley's images addressed the most controversial issues of the day: gender roles and human sexuality. The publishers, John Lane and Elkin Mathews, included thirteen of the sixteen illustrations produced by Beardsley in the 1894 version of Wilde's play. Out of these thirteen images, three were altered by the artist at the publishers' request.

The actual circumstances surrounding the suppression and modification of six drawings has yet to be determined to the satisfaction of art historians who first began considering the issues seriously in 1927.[1] Moreover, as time advances and critical reactions change with new cultural perspectives, the possibility of discovering an explanation seems progressively more elusive. One promising line of enquiry, which if it cannot provide answers will at least produce fascinating revelations, uncertainties and new questions, involves sifting through and reviewing the critical reactions to Aubrey Beardsley's

[1] Haldane Macfall's pioneering study of the Salomé illustrations appeared in 1927. See Haldane Macfall, Aubrey Beardsley: The Clown, The Harlequin, The Pierrot of His Age (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1927).

Salomé illustrations from 1894 to the present. It must be noted at the outset that this thesis chooses to focus mainly on the production of Salomé by the artist and his publishers, its consumption by art historians and, to a lesser extent, the ways in which it was read by the upper middle classes in the late nineteenth century. Following this route I will attempt to reconstruct the actual events surrounding the censure of several images and, moreover, attempt to explain why other equally erotic details in Beardsley's drawings appear to have been ignored by his publishers as well as by subsequent art historians. This statement needs to be qualified since I will suggest that these details were not innocently overlooked by Lane and Mathews but rather that they were passed over in a deliberate attempt to exploit the shock value of the drawings. Like Beardsley, these publishers knew how to maintain a guise of innocence while simultaneously exploiting the potential of well disguised erotic material.

Since, as I have mentioned, critical reactions change over time as they are influenced by increasing historical distance as well as ideological factors, both the way Beardsley's images are analyzed and the results of those analyses differ. For example, erotic details missed or ignored by Victorian critics in 1894, such as the dwarf's aroused member in The Stomach Dance (Figure 1), are taken up by more recent art historians such as Ian Fletcher who in 1987 discussed this detail with considerable relish. How can we account for such dramatic shifts ? Even within the last fifteen years, modes of examination have changed significantly. A typical case in point is provided by the tendency during the 1970s, found in writers such as Stanley Weintraub and Brigid Brophy, to speculate about which images were suppressed and why. And yet the approach of Weintraub and Brophy differs from the more recent work of Linda Zatlin, in the

late 1980s, who has uncovered and identified those erotic details previously disregarded by Beardsley's publishers. Given that temporal variations in discourse characterize any critical examination of a popular image, why are Beardsley's drawings for Salomé important enough to warrant attention ? The answer lies in the fact that it is only by mapping out the patterns of critical response and recognizing how viewing positions and modes of investigation shift that we may fully understand the extent of these images' power and influence. Why are these illustrations as actively discussed today as they were in 1894 ? What is it that keeps them animated within the field of art historical discourse ninety-eight years after the fact ? I would be inclined to suggest that it is the highly enigmatic and sensational character of Beardsley's drawings for Wilde's Salomé that keeps them alive, particularly at a time when similar gender and sexual issues are still being debated. Moreover, many art historians have perhaps been drawn to this material in order to perpetuate the notion of a highly repressed Victorian society which, by way of contrast, makes their own period of the twentieth century look remarkably liberated. As Michel Foucault reminds us, the idea of a "highly repressed" Victorian society was a mythical construction by later critics.[2] Also of enduring interest is the curious personality of the artist as well as the virtually endless supply of potentially erotic details in the images. It should be emphasized that this thesis is part of an ongoing critical investigation of the ways in which these images continue to signify and shape sexual meanings in the 1990s.

To begin I will map out a century of critical response to Salomé,

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[2] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978): 6 - 7. "Because this repression is confirmed, one can discreetly bring into coexistence concepts which fear of ridicule or the bitterness of history prevents most of us from putting side by side: revolution and happiness; ... or indeed, revolution and pleasure."

especially as it addresses the suppressed and altered images. First of all, it should be noted that when Oscar Wilde's Salomé was released in 1894, the critics reacted with shock and outrage. The Saturday Review described Beardsley's illustrations as clever pranks which parodied Felicien Rops and Japanese themes while the artist "laughs at Mr. Wilde."[3] Even though the critic was clearly amused and his/her critical approach deliberately frivolous, such comments should not be lightly dismissed. Instead one needs to explore what was at stake for this writer. Perhaps by characterizing Salomé as a prank and the artist as a "very clever young man," this critic avoided confronting more serious issues such as Victorian notions about human sexuality in general and women's sexual liberation in particular. Furthermore, as a critic for the popular press, the author appealed to the masses' expectations and level of sophistication. After all, an open discussion of eroticism would have likely shocked his/her readers. For these reasons, then, the Saturday Review's reviewer's carefree attitude was meant to distance both the critic and his/her readers from the images and their social critique of Victorian society. In another instance the London Times reviewer noted that Salomé was "a joke ... a very poor joke" and its illustrations grotesque, unintelligible and repulsive.[4] Once again as a conservative critic in the popular press, this writer seemed unwilling to address Beardsley's erotic content directly which would have revealed what she/he most wanted to suppress. Although the images were described as ugly and unclear, the critic must have been aware of Salomé's highly sexual subject matter which was directly presented by the artist. Moreover, it is significant that the critic's tone was vehement. In many ways this writer typifies the harsh social

[3] "Salomé," Saturday Review (London, 1894): 317.

[4] "Books of the Week," Times (London, March 8, 1894): 12.

response which generally greeted Beardsley's images often taking the form of anger which expressed itself in a barrage of insults. Like the humour of the Saturday Review, the anger of the Times was used as a smoke-screen to divert attention from sensitive sexual issues.[5]

The Studio, however, was not in a position to express horror since it had already published some of Beardsley's work. In April 1893, his J'ai Baisé Ta Bouche, Iokanaan (a drawing inspired by Wilde's Salomé) (Figure 2) first appeared in a Studio article by Joseph Pennell titled "A New Illustrator: Aubrey Beardsley."[6] In effect the Studio had launched Beardsley's career by associating him with the author, Oscar Wilde, and the publishers, John Lane and Elkin Mathews, who produced the English version of Salomé. Furthermore, the Studio had engaged Beardsley to design the cover of their magazine's first issue. Perhaps not surprisingly, then the Studio loyally supported Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé which were praised as rare and esoteric, audacious and extravagant, and entirely admirable. In fact, the Studio called Salomé the

[5] It would certainly be fascinating to read a later critique of Salomé by this author to discover how his/her opinion may have altered. This opportunity does exist in the writings of Karl Beckson between 1970 and 1989. In his Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970): 272 & 303, Beckson ironically describes Beardsley as an "exotic artist" who "turns Salomé into a drama of powderpuff and greasepaint." Probably, he was referring to The Burial of Salomé (Figure 21) specifically. Twenty years later Beckson acknowledges that Beardsley challenged the Victorian public and goes on to reveal every potentially sexual detail he can find in "The Artist as Transcendent Phallus," Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley, edited by Robert Langenfeld (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1989).

[6] Joseph Pennell, "A New Illustrator: Aubrey Beardsley," Studio (April, 1893): 14-19. This article brings up some interesting questions: When Beardsley's J'ai Baise Ta Bouche Iokanaan J'ai Baise Ta Bouche appeared in the April 1893 Studio was Beardsley aware that an English version of the play was being considered for publication ? Was this drawing's inclusion a deliberated attempt to draw both Wilde and Lanes's attention to Beardsley's talent ? How much input did the artist have concerning the choice of illustrations to accompany Pennell's article ? Moreover, why was Joseph Pennell so "appreciative" of Beardsley's work when the majority of critics were suspicious ?

"most remarkable production of the modern press."[7] In terms of the images themselves, however, the Studio author explained that the "exact purpose or the meaning of their symbolism, is happily not necessary to consider here."[8] By focusing on the formal aspects of the drawings, therefore, the Studio, like the Times and Saturday Review, avoided acknowledging that these images challenged notions of moral propriety.

The views expressed by Edward E. Hale Jr. in the Dial (an American periodical published in Chicago) in July of 1894 directly opposed the Studio's opinion of Salomé. Whereas the Studio defined Salomé as a landmark of the "decadent fin de siecle" whose significance was destined to prevail beyond its day, Mr. Hale saw "Mr. Oscar Wilde's Salomé... (as) that froth and foam of literature ... which is itself shortly blown away and lost to sight and remembrance."[9] Beardsley's illustrations were "strange things" according to Hale, and their "lack of originality" suggested a heavy reliance on "almost every phase of art that has ever existed."[10] Like the Saturday Review and the Times, it would seem that Hale avoided the issues of gender and sexuality by focusing entirely on the formal aspects of the drawings. Moreover, by characterizing them as "strange" and unoriginal, he denied himself and the public the opportunity to look beneath Beardsley's "disguises" because "the shifting dazzle of [Beardsley's] influences [blinds us to Salomé's] true character and flavour unadulterated."[11]

Turning to look at twentieth century art criticism, one must consider the

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[7] "New Publications," Studio (February, 1894): 184.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Edward E. Hale Jr.,"Signs of Life in Literature," Dial (July 1, 1894): 11.

[10] Hale: 13.

[11] Ibid.

writings of Arthur Symons whose well-known essay on Aubrey Beardsley appeared as an introduction to a number of catalogues published between 1898 and 1918. Given the numerous reprintings of this essay, Symons perhaps best typifies early twentieth century Salomé criticism.[12] According to Symons, "Beardsley attains pure beauty ... in the best of the Salomé designs."[13] The Black Cape (Figure 3) is irreverent; The Climax (Figure 4) austere and terrible.[14] Like the Studio's anonymous writer, Symons' approach deliberately addressed the images formally and overlooked the obvious sexual imagery Beardsley employed to offend mainstream Victorian propriety and expose what he would have considered a false 'sense of decency.' It would almost seem that Symon's focus was an attempt to convince the public that the images' highly charged sexual details were merely aspects of their decoration. This suggests that Symons was protecting Beardsley's reputation as a highly respected illustrator. The only difference between the different versions of Symons' catalogues were the choice of images. Interestingly, The Stomach Dance did not appear in the 1918 version. Perhaps the author, realized how "grossly obscene"[15] it was, and silently withdrew the drawing.

Haldane Macfall, writing in 1927, acknowledged both Beardsley's overt sexual imagery in some of the drawings as well as his intention to offend the puritanically minded sector of the public. However, he refused to take his explanation very far. For instance, when he described the musician in The Stomach Dance as lascivious, and "grossly obscene" he refused to consider the

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[12] To my knowledge Arthur Symons' essay was printed three times: Aubrey Beardsley (London: Unicorn Press, 1898), Aubrey Beardsley (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1905) and The Art of Aubrey Beardsley (New York: Boni & Liverright Inc., 1918).

[13] Arthur Symons, Aubrey Beardsley (London: Unicorn Press, 1898): 30.

[14] Symons (1898): 35.

[15] Macfall: 101.

reasons for these claims.[16] Instead his 'expose'[17] was more or less comprised of hints and suggestions for the reader to complete by actively looking at the images. As Macfall noted, the Title-page (Figure 5) and Enter Herodias (Figure 6) were slightly altered while "more offensive things were passed by."[18] Inevitably his readers were left wondering which images were passed by ? How were others altered and why was this done? The author seems to have cleverly engaged the viewer to do his 'dirty work' while maintaining the sort of acceptably decent facade which characterized late 1920s art criticism.

In 1948 R. A. Walker informed his readers that some images were suppressed but neglected to tell them why, giving his readers not even as much as a gentle aside. Except for noting that Beardsley's images were derisive comments on Wilde's play, Walker analyzed the designs mainly in formal terms. In this respect Walker's criticism largely returned to the familiar pattern established in the nineteenth century which basically ignored the issues of gender and sexuality. One wonders why Walker's criticism echoes that of Symons from 1898, especially in the passages where Walker describes the images as "astonishing designs, ... irrelevant, irreverent and irrational"?[19] Is it possible that even fifty years after Beardsley's death English society still found it difficult to criticize his explicit images ? What vestiges of so-called Victorianism remained within this society making the representation of independent women and human sexuality so problematic ? Significantly, R. A. Walker's introduction to The Best of Beardsley still embodied what we have come to consider

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley (Nicholas Salerno): 406. Macfall was a personal friend of Beardsley and his book of 1927 was based more on gossip than on research.

[18] Macfall: 101.

[19] R. A. Walker, The Best of Beardsley (London: The Bodley Head, 1948): 11.

stereotypical notions of Victorian prudery.

Between Walker in 1948 and Brian Reade in 1967 the criticism of Beardsley underwent a shift of major significance which can be related to 1960s revolutionary attitudes toward human sexuality and the liberated woman. Reade openly discussed the erotic details which seem to have influenced the publishers' decision to either suppress or else request alteration to some of the images. For example, Reade pointed out that the first version of The Toilette of Salomé (Figure 7) was discarded because the boy's bent spine indicated an indulgence in masturbation which the boy performed while gazing at another boy with a coffee tray.[20] Moreover, Reade recognized those erotic passages overlooked by Lane and Mathews such as "the infantile monster whose excitement is covered by his clothing."[21] No doubt, the tendency toward the freedom of sexual expression which characterized the Sixties attracted a new audience to Beardsley's sexually-loaded images and as a consequence made Reade feel free to openly discuss their sexual content.

A similar analytical approach characterized the period from 1967 to the early 1980s. Critics such as Stanley Weintraub and Brigid Brophy in 1976 and Miriam Benkovitz in 1981 and Edward Hodnett in 1982 also tackled sexual issues. Like Reade, these historians speculated about those erotic details which influenced the suppression and alteration of some drawings, as well as those details overlooked by Lane and Mathews. Like critics of the first half of the century, however, they maintained a viewing position that was detached from their subject matter. Although Weintraub, for example, noted that Beardsley hid

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[20] Brian Reade, Aubrey Beardsley (New York: Bonanza Books, 1967): 337. This, of course, raises the specter of Beardsley's homosexuality, something not mentioned by this critic.

[21] Reade: 337.

improper detail in ornate decoration he did not relate his findings to the artist's motives, the publisher's intentions, the social and sexual climate of Beardsley's period, the censorship laws, or the aims which underlay the agenda of the decadent avant-garde in the 1890s.[22] Certainly the critics of this period recognized that Beardsley used sexual references to offend Victorian viewers' sense of propriety, but by not situating these images within the surrounding atmosphere of sexual crisis which was characterized by the questioning of social conventions, they did not explain why the public of the 1890s was so horrified by Beardsley's Salomé drawings.

Similarly, since the late 1980s the studies of Ian Fletcher, Karl Beckson and Linda Zatlin have also considered these erotic details. Their analyses (albeit more enthusiastic than earlier ones) resembled those of the previous twenty years in that they neglected to connect the Salomé drawings with the crisis in Victorian society. Moreover, Beardsley's deliberate offensiveness, particularly in the case of the details missed by the publishers, was still understood as an act of vengeance directed towards both Lane's fastidious inspection of the artist's drawings, and Wilde's rejection of the artist's English

[22] These issues will be discussed in this chapter and throughout this thesis and considered in relation to various critics' reconstruction of the circumstances which surrounded the exclusion and adjustment of some images.

interpretation of Salomé in favour of Lord Alfred Douglas' translation.[23] For example, in terms of Lane, Karl Beckson observed that "Beardsley challenged his publisher, John Lane, to discover hidden obscenities."[24] Further developing this point, with respect to Wilde, Fletcher recorded that "Wilde, regarding himself as a contemporary judge of tone and taste, doubtless made positive suggestions that infuriated the artist as much as the commercial prudence that dictated Lane's more negative interventions."[25] If we accept these suppositions of Beckson and Fletcher, Beardsley's drawings become, as Benkovitz stated in 1981, "the playfulness of an impudent boy..."[26] who was motivated by "revenge,"as Percy Muir observed.[27] It should be noted that this assumption casts Lane as well as the Victorian critics and public as the innocent victims of Beardsley's clever wit.

Ian Fletcher does, however, suggest that Lane "wished to exploit ... Beardsley's shock tactics ... up to a point", but here his speculations end.[28]

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[23] The English version of Oscar Wilde's Salomé, which came out on February 9, 1894, was illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley and translated, from the French, by Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas. Prior to this event, Beardsley had made an English translation of Salomé which was unacceptable to Wilde. Lord Douglas' translation, however, was approved which led the offended Beardsley to remark that Wilde and Douglas were "really dreadful people." Actually, Wilde did not much care for Douglas' translation either and favoured it simply because he and Douglas were involved in an intimate relationship. The fact was, that Wilde disliked the translation and reworked it to his own satisfaction. When the English version of Salomé was released, Lord Douglas' name was not mentioned on the title page as the translator of the play. Instead, it simply read: Salomé: A Tragedy in One Act: Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde, with Sixteen Drawings by Aubrey Beardsley.

[24] Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley (Karl Beckson): 211.

[25] Ian Fletcher, Aubrey Beardsley (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987): 74. Moreover, according to Macfall (p. 102), Beardsley "resented any attempt to prevent his offending the public sense of decency."

[26] Miriam Benkovitz, Aubrey Beardsley: An Account of his Life (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980): 83.

[27] Percy Muir, Victorian Illustrated Books (London: B. T. Batsford, 1971): 183.

[28] Fletcher: 74.

Might we not suppose that given his profession, John Lane was aware of censorial boundaries and chose Beardsley to illustrate Salomé precisely because of his ingenious ability to disguise erotic details ? Moreover, although he withdrew or requested the modification of overt sexual references, Lane might have eagerly let pass less obvious sexual references so that Salomé would "include more erotic details than had ever been seen before in an book openly published and distributed in England."[29] After all, Lane would have realized that a controversial Salomé would have created the sort of a public controversy that fuels demand, which would in turn lead to John Lane and The Bodley Head being considered revolutionary publishers. Furthermore, if Lane had, as Beckson states, "used a magnifying glass to uncover the offending images,"[30] could he have possibly overlooked such "flagrant eroticism" as the dwarf's aroused member "barely disguised as clothing decoration"[31] in The Stomach Dance ?

At this point I would like to reconstruct those events surrounding the suppression of several images, as outlined by various art historians. The appearance of Salomé with the Head of St. John the Baptist (or J'ai Baise Ta Bouche, Iokanaan) in the April 1893 issue of the Studio convinced Robert Ross that Aubrey Beardsley was the artist to illustrate the English version of Salomé. His recommendation was accepted by Wilde, as well as by Lane and Mathews, and Beardsley was engaged to produce ten full page drawings and a cover design for fifty guineas.[32] In fact, Oscar Wilde initially felt that only Beardsley

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[29] Stanley Weintraub, Aubrey Beardsley: Imp of the Perverse (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976): 75.

[30] Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley (Karl Beckson): 211.

[31] Linda Zatlin, Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990): 4.

[32] Weintraub: 55 & 56.

understood Salomé as he did. However, this generosity changed as each design was submitted to the publishers and their confidence in Beardsley's ability to appropriately illustrate Salomé faded.[33] Wilde voiced his dislike of the drawings which he felt were "too Japanese while my play is Byzantine ... and like the naughty scribbles a precocious school boy makes in the margins of his copybooks ... [furthermore,] they are cruel and evil, and so like dear Aubrey, who has a face like a silver hatchet, with grass green hair."[34] Weintraub, however, tells us that although Wilde was torn between horror and admiration, he probably would have accepted the group of drawings on account of their theatricality.[35]

The questions of who requested alterations and why they did so seem to have been contested. It should be remembered that in the nineteenth century, a book was prosecuted only after publication. In the case of Salomé the implications of this are double-edged. Had the publishers wished Salomé to pass into the public sphere unobstructed by censorial debates and warnings, Lane and Mathews would have had to closely inspect the images and text for any potential sexual references. However, had they desired the publicity which surrounded scandalous literature and dramatically increased the demand for it, the publishers would have censored only the most blatant sexual details, allowing the less obvious ones to remain. Erotogenic images (although not mentioned by critics of Beardsley's day) must have been obvious to Lane,

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[33] Weintraub: 69 & 71.

[34] Alan Bird, The Plays of Oscar Wilde (London: Visions Press Ltd., 1977): 75.

[35] Weintraub: 69 & 71. Edward Hodnett agrees, saying that Wilde was a tolerant man and only objected to the illustrations' lack of connection with the text. See Image and Text: Studies in the Illustration of English Literature (London: Scolar Press, 1982): 232.

Mathews, and Wilde as well as to critics and art historians of the period.[36] Bearing these two possible strategies in mind, one needs to ask who, if anyone, desired the expurgation of all erotic references from Beardsley's drawings ?

In 1927, Haldane Macfall, who was the first to document the suppressed and altered designs, admitted to recognizing the erotic details which were overlooked by the publishers. According to Macfall, Lane and Mathews were "two troubled men who would have had to bear the brunt of the obloquy for any mistake of indiscretion [requesting] ... one or two ... puritanical alterations [so as to] ... offend no one's sense of decorum."[37] Similarly, Reade pointed out, the subject matter of the first Toilette of Salomé, for example, was "too much for the publishers" and had to be dropped.[38]

Weintraub likewise noted that Beardsley's drawings were affected by "the publishers' sense of scandal and decorum" despite the fact that they greatly admired them.[39] Curiously, Weintraub then commented that Beardsley himself withdrew several original designs and replaced them with substitute drawings in order to avoid Lane "attaching fig-leaves or expurgating drawings [Beardsley] ... was satisfied with."[40] Weintraub neglected to identify which illustrations and did not discuss why this turn of events in which Beardsley becomes his own censor has never been discussed elsewhere ! As Nicholas Salerno stated in 1989, "even now we cannot be sure of the circumstances concerning ... the

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[36] I cannot believe that "Beardsley's illustrations were not comprehensible to the public", as Alan Bird states (p. 75). Had this been the case, how can one account for the shock and outrage which followed the play's public release ?

[37] Macfall: 101.

[38] Reade: 337.

[39] Weintraub: 69.

[40] Weintraub: 72.

illustrations for Salomé and it is doubtful that we will ever be sure."[41]

One point of departure for exploring the circumstances which produced these images is an investigation of the artist's intentions. As Linda Zatlin noted in 1990, Beardsley's Salomé drawings "mocked English prudishness by forcing viewers to acknowledge the private, the erotic, moment. He was often inventive and indirect in his challenge to restrictive social conventions ... [and] ingeniously slipped flagrant eroticism past Victorian censors."[42] Here Zatlin was specifically referring to the 1857 censorship law which defined what was acceptable in art and literature. Understood in this way, Beardsley was playing a clever game to see how far he could go with his publishers and the censors. However, the extreme complexity and ambivalence of the illustrations suggests that these erotic details represented more than game playing, and in fact when the images are situated in the context of the 1890s, it is evident that the artist intended them to seriously engage with controversial issues of his day.

The late nineteenth century was a time of questioning and challenging social conventions, particularly the institution of sexuality. Through their visual and literary works, the decadents rebelled against the notion of Christian guilt associated with sexuality. Beardsley must have been familiar with this idea since he placed Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal in the first suppressed version of The Toilette of Salomé. In this work Baudelaire questioned that sexuality was bad given that it was a natural human function. Beardsley's Salomé illustrations echoed this attitude by creating a sexual confrontation with the reader which was not distorted by religious censorship. Indeed, such sentiments were central to Oscar Wilde's Salomé, which although derived from

[41] Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley (Nicholas Salerno): 273.

[42] Zatlin: 4.

the Bible, challenged and ridiculed traditional religious doctrine by recreating Salomé as a powerful and aggressive female who was quite unlike her original characterization as an instrument of her mother's ambition. In fact, in June of 1892 the "Lord Chamberlain refused to license the play on the ground that it presented Biblical characters."[43] Is it any wonder, then, that Aubrey Beardsley and John Lane seized the opportunity to make their mark by associating themselves with such a controversial and timely project ? As we have seen, Salomé truly established 'reputations' when it was released in 1894.

Having reviewed the circumstances of the production of Salomé, it is appropriate to introduce the images themselves and explore the controversy which accompanied their critical interpretation. Given that the diverse discussion surrounding their suppression, alteration, substitution and erotic potential is extensive, a detailed examination of the various critical interpretations of the drawings as well as their shifting position within the field of art historical discourse is, therefore, required. Most of the images will be discussed according to their placement, or intended placement, in the 1894 edition of Salomé.

What interests most historians about The Woman in the Moon, which served as the frontispiece to Salomé, (Figure 8) is the question of the artist's motives for caricaturing Oscar Wilde's face. Was Beardsley being clever, insulting or teasing ? A more obvious question, however, is why Beardsley depicted a 'Woman' in the Moon rather than the traditional 'Man' in the Moon ? According to Haldane Macfall, the publishers changed the title from 'Man' to 'Woman'[44] possibly to discourage any associations with Wilde. Why they wished

[43] Donald Ericksen, Oscar Wilde (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977): 123.

[44] Macfall: 102.

to do this remains unclear. Another problem with this image is the existence of an emasculated version (Figure 9) which was not published and which no one mentions. Indeed, as critics such as Weintraub point out, this drawing with its full male genitals (Figure 8) was accepted by the publishers and included in the first version of Salomé. Perhaps, as Percy Muir argued in 1971, the offending member in the frontispiece was overlooked because it was "only a little one."[45]

Similarly, the Title-page has three versions one of which has been ignored by scholars (Figure 10). However, it is commonly held that the alteration to the second version (Figure 11) resulted from Lane's insistence that the original Title-page (Figure 5) was "hardly appropriate for use as a poster in book-store windows."[46] To this Beardsley readily agreed fearing the possibility that the public promotion of Salomé (and indirectly his illustrations) would be jeopardized. Later writers like Karl Beckson refer to the number of phallic triads overlooked by Lane and Mathews, one of which appears here in the form of an androgynous figure flanked by lighted candles while another similar configuration appears in The Eyes of Herod (Figure 12).[47] Significantly, this interest in phallic images in Beardsley's illustrations does not appear until the studies of Ian Fletcher, Karl Beckson and Linda Zatlin were published in the late 1980s. Moreover, the female figure as it appears in images like The Peacock Skirt (Figure 13) and The Border for the List of Pictures (Figure 14) is also read as a phallic symbol by Fletcher. Was this Beardsley's intention, and if so, what does it mean in the context of Salomé and the artist's own life ? Only an investigation into the psychological make-up of the Salomé character, not to

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[45] Muir: 183.

[46] Benkovitz: 84.

[47] Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley (Karl Beckson): 214.

mention the artist himself, could answer this question. Further complicating this issue is Hodnett's assertion that The Peacock Skirt was a substitution for John and Salomé (Figure 15).[48] The reasons for this substitution are not readily apparent since both drawings are irrelevant to the story and compositionally quite similar.

Indeed, the suppression of John and Salomé is an extremely curious and provocative problem. The Black Cape, which has been described as a caricature of period fashion, was considered a replacement for John and Salomé by Macfall, Muir and Weintraub.[49] More recently, Hodnett has suggested it was a substitute for Salomé on Settle (Figure 16). To complicate matters, Fletcher has avoided the controversy, stating only that The Black Cape was intended to replace another illustration at the request of the publishers.[50] In this instance one wonders why art historians have been unable to agree upon which drawings were suppressed and substituted.

Returning to Salomé on Settle, let us examine its problematic position within the Beardsley literature. Clearly there has been little agreement regarding the image's purpose and meaning. In 1982, Edward Hodnett affirmed that this earlier image (which had appeared in a different version of a volume of Bon Mots) was deleted in favour of The Black Cape. Moreover, he professed not to understand why a woman "on a white settle, placed at an angle so its narrow back frame and two delicate legs break the lower part of the all white background, ... with black hair piled up like a coolie [and sitting] ... with the back of her black lace trimmed gown to the reader" would be objectionable.[51]

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[48] Hodnett: 239.

[49] Macfall: 102, Muir: 183, Weintraub: 72.

[50] Fletcher: 74.

[51] Hodnett: 240.

Apparently, Hodnett had neglected to read Weintraub who explained in 1976 that Salomé on Settle was intended as a replacement but not used because from the back the viewer might think the kimono was open and the wand was a dildo.[52] In fact, a portion of this explanation was given as early as 1967 by Brian Reade who pointed out that Salomé on Settle was not published in 1894 possibly because the baton could be interpreted as a dildo.[53] Reade's statement was virtually repeated verbatim by Fletcher and Zatlin.

Although the Platonic Lament (Figure 17) is an image neither altered nor suppressed, it has not been exempt from critical attention. Linda Zatlin, for example, has stated that the dwarf's "right hand is hidden in the act of masturbation."[54] Such comments indicate that recent scholarship has tended to discover some form of sexual innuendo in virtually all of Beardsley's images. Enter Herodias, an illustration in which sexual references proliferate ranging from the ghoul's aroused member to Herodias' strong sexual awareness, is certainly proof of that. Together with The Stomach Dance and the suppressed Toilette of Salomé, Enter Herodias is one of the most widely discussed images from Salomé. Despite such obvious erotic passages as the ambiguously draped erection of the seated figure which "extends outward to the middle candle, which seems to point to it (the erection), as though Beardsley does not want the viewer to miss the joke" and the burning phallic triad whose centre candle, gestured to by the "clown," seems to burn "more fiercely than the other two which rest upon two ... penises," the only alteration Lane requested was the addition of a fig-leaf to conceal the prominently displayed genitals of the naked

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[52] Weintraub: 77.

[53] Reade: 337.

[54] Linda Zatlin, "Aubrey Beardsley Counts the Ways," Victorian Newsletter (Spring, 1985): 1, Zatlin (1990): 188.

Page (Figure 18).[55] According to Muir and Simon Wilson, by ostentatiously adding the large fig-leaf to the page-boy and tying it on with an incongruous little bow, Beardsley not only draws attention to the ridiculous act of censorship but also to the censored parts themselves.[56] This act would certainly accord with the decadents' program of challenging various ludicrous sexual conventions. The presence of Oscar Wilde, as the clown emphatically gesturing to these physical details, presents him as someone who questions the nature of so-called Victorian propriety.

Like the Platonic Lament, The Stomach Dance (Figure 1) was neither altered nor suppressed. However, the dwarf's presence has occasioned great speculation. As early as 1927, Macfall was shocked that "the lasciviousness of the musician ... offended nobody's eye."[57] More recently, Wilson has suggested that perhaps the publishers failed to notice the "bulging phallus of Salomé's accompanist" because of the novelty of Beardsley's style and "due to the dancer's erotic impact."[58] Fletcher has taken this idea further by reading the dwarf's enormous lute as a surrogate penis that leaves his pubic hair and erect penis clearly visible to the reader. Moreover, he sees a collection of penises encircling and dangling about the figure's waist.[59] Hence, according to Fletcher, even if Lane's oversight had not been deliberate, this most blatant reference to sexuality insured Salomé's scandalous reputation.

Finally turning to the two versions of The Toilette of Salomé (Figures 7

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[55] Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley (Karl Beckson): 214. I cannot believe, as Weintraub states, that John Lane "clearly ... missed this point" (p. 60). Beardsley's publisher was, most likely, not only aware of this erotic detail but admired and counted on the artist's expert ability to disguise such references.

[56] Simon Wilson, Beardsley (London: Phaidon, 1976): 11, Muir: 183.

[57] Macfall: 101.

[58] Wilson: 10.

[59] Fletcher: 87.

and 19) we find that a completely new drawing of this subject was requested by Lane, who in this case would not accept minor adjustments to the original. In 1927, Macfall could not understand why this drawing, which required only a slight correction (he does not specify what), had been completely withdrawn and replaced by the "Georgian Toilette."[60] Forty years afterward, the question was apparently resolved when Reade recognized that the first version (Figure 7) contained a reference to masturbation in the bent spine of the seated youth with his gaze fixed upon a second youth holding a coffee tray.[61] In 1976, Simon Wilson drew attention to the pubic hair and tumescence of the seated youth, Salomé's nudity and the position of her left hand, the way in which the pierrot's skirts echo the shape of Salomé's breasts, the nudity of the page-boy, the ambiguous gesture of the musician's hand on the stem of his instrument and the fetus on the dressing table. Moreover, as Wilson observes, the books which include Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal and Zola's La Terre were considered pornographic in the 1890s.[62] Since Beckson, Zatlin and Fletcher agree that three figures in the first version are obviously masturbating, Lane's objections become readily apparent. The substitute Toilette of Salomé (Figure 19) is described by Weintraub as "a nineties scene."[63] The scandalous row of books, which include Apuleius's The Golden Ass, Abbé Provost's Manon Lescaut, Paul Verlaine's Fêtes Gallantes, a volume by the Marquis De Sade and Zola's Nana, are now Beardsley's only gesture of defiance.

This tendency of recent art historians to dwell on such sexual details raises the question whether they read more into images than might have been

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[60] Macfall: 101.

[61] Reade: 337.

[62] Wilson: 11.

[63] Weintraub: 72.

intended. An example of this might be Fletcher's inclination to see almost every figure from The Border for the List of Pictures (Figure 14) to the Dancer's Reward (Figure 20) and The Climax (Figure 4) as phallic references.[64] Whether such interpretations are valid is a moot point which is further complicated by the enigmatic character of both Beardsley and his work.

By questioning various established assumptions concerning the production of Beardsley's Salomé illustrations I hope to challenge the notion that Beardsley was merely playing naughty adolescent games with his publishers. Apart from his repressive role as censor John Lane's function has rarely been analyzed. Yet if an alternative perspective is adopted, one could argue that Lane exploited Beardsley and profited by the artist's "fast developing ... reputation for getting impish delight out of concealing improper detail in ornate decoration."[65] This tendency to cast Beardsley's intentions as acts of revenge and game-playing tend to minimize his rebellion against certain Victorian constructions of sexuality. Now that we have looked at the ways in which these images have been read by several generations of Beardsley scholars, it is time to restore them to their original context where they can be seen as both the products of a Victorian crisis, and the creations of an artist who ambivalently positioned himself both inside and outside the English cultural establishment. At this point we need to ask what these illustrations tell us about Aubrey Beardsley, the decadent movement, John Lane, the popular press and, in a larger sense, what they reveal about the social climate of Victorian England in 1894 ? Clearly a new critical perspective is required. Taking up the words of the Studio critic from 1894, "those who find it the very essence of the decadent

[64] Fletcher: 79, 85, 89 & 90.

[65] Weintraub: 59.

fin de siècle will rank Salomé as the typical volume of the period too recent to estimate its actual value,"[66] I think it is now time to establish the historical significance of Beardsley's Salomé illustrations. My premise throughout the following study is that Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé were intended to function as a critique of the prevailing sexual values of late Victorian society, especially as those values appeared in the literary and visual representations of the 1890s in general, and in controversies from 1893-1894, in particular. Each chapter will take up the theme of (female) sexuality in order to clarify how women were viewed during this period, particularly from Beardsley's perspective. From the image of the New Woman in the press to a number of myths surrounding gender roles, Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé rarely neglected an opportunity to comment upon the most controversial issues of his day.

[66] "New Publications," Studio: 185.

CHAPTER TWO

WHO ELSE TAKES UP 'SALOME' ?

As far as we know, the first account of Salomé which appeared in the New Testament Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark described her, merely, as Herodias' daughter who danced and requested the head of St. John the Baptist at her mother's urging. In the first-century, the daughter of Herodias was identified as Salomé by the Jewish historian, Flavius Josepheus. Slowly, Salomé's significance in the story increased as artists and writers became fascinated by her. Her increasing prominence culminated in the latter half of the nineteenth century when Salomé became a popular femme fatale figure.[67] As a result of a growing interest in the femme fatale theme the character of Salomé was understood "as the archetypal image of woman as an evil and destructive force whose sexuality and very existence threatened the lives of men."[68] Salomé presented such an ideal femme fatale stereotype that artists and writers from a variety of aesthetic movements in France, Germany, Britain and America utilized the Salomé story.[69] Consequently, the historical person of Salomé became a vehicle for artistic conceptions of the femme fatale motif. Some of the

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[67] Anne Hudson Jones and Karen Kingsley, "Salomé in Late Nineteenth Century French Art and Literature," Studies in Iconography vol. 9 (Arizona State University, 1983): 107.

[68] Nancy L. Pressly, Salomé: La Belle Dame Sans Merci (San Antonio Museum of Art, May 1 - June 26, 1983): 11.

[69] It should also be noted that Salomé's popularity as a femme fatale figure coincides with the anti-Semitic attitude of the late nineteenth century. Readers of the day would probably have identified Salomé as Jewish and, consequently, the sexualized 'other.' Rather than viewing an English woman, for example, as a sexual being, sexuality was displaced onto the women of a different culture. The British Brothers' League, established between 1901 and 1905, was the first organized campaign against Jews in Britain. For more on this topic see Colin Holmes' Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876 - 1939 (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1979): 89 - 103.

artists and writers who took up the Salomé theme in the late nineteenth century were: Heinrich Heine (Atta Troll, 1847), Stéphane Mallarmé (Hérodiade, 1864, published 1871), Eugene Delacroix (Beheading of St. John, 1858), Puvis de Chavannes (Beheading of John the Baptist, exhibited 1870), Henri Regnault (Salomé, exhibited 1870), Paul Jacques Baudry (The Dance of Herodias, 1874), Gustave Moreau (Salomé dansant devant Hérode and L'Apparition, exhibited 1876), Gustave Flaubert ("Hérodias" in Trois Contes, published April 1877), Jules Massenet (Hérodiade, an opera presented in Belgium 1881), Joris-Karl Huysmans (A rebours, 1884), Charles Ricketts (Salomé, 1885 - 1890), Edouard Toudouze (Salomé Triumphant, exhibited 1886), Jean-Jacques Henner (The Daughter of Herodias with the Head of John the Baptist, 1887), Jules Laforgues (Salomé, 1887), Ella Ferris Pell (Salomé, 1890), Arnold Böcklin (Salomé, 1891) and Oscar Wilde (Salomé, 1891 in French, 1894 in English with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley). For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus upon two conceptions of the Salomé story in order to show how other artists and writers, besides Aubrey Beardsley, perceived this femme fatale character in the late nineteenth century. The works addressed will be Gustave Moreau's Salomé dansant devant Hérode (Figure 22) and L'Apparition (Figure 23), and Gustave Flaubert's "Herodias." I selected Moreau and Flaubert because their presentations of Salomé were quite antithetical: Moreau's being otherworldly and Flaubert's being corporeal. In my opinion, Beardsley reflected both the timelessness of Moreau and the realism of Flaubert when he created a Salomé both mysterious and firmly engaged with social/sexual issues of the 1890s. By these means I hope to provide an accurate historical context within which to study Aubrey Beardsley's interpretation of Salomé as the New Woman

in control of her own sexuality.

Before Moreau and Flaubert are introduced specifically, however, a survey of the alterations to the Salomé story by the hands of some other well-known artists and writers between 1847 and 1891 will be considered. Heinrich Heine presented a French translation of his Atta Troll in the March 15, 1847 issue of Revue des deux Mondes. It should be understood that in this story Heine confused the identities of Salomé and Herodias, the latter performing the traditional role of the daughter. The resulting strength of the Salomé figure in Atta Troll was especially significant in fostering Salomé's eventual transformation into the femme fatale figure of Wilde and Beardsley's Salomé. In the resulting transformation, rather than acting upon maternal guidance, Salomé was given an erotic motive in that she was in love with St. John the Baptist. Another aspect of Atta Troll which influenced later characterizations of Salomé was the monstrous vision of her kissing, tossing and toying with St. John's severed head. Beardsley's The Climax (Figure 4) and The Dancer's Reward (Figure 20) suggested such grotesque interactions which were also part of Wilde's text:

> SALOME:
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> Ah ! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. Well ! I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit. Yes, I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I said it. Ah ! I will kiss it now .... Well Jokanaan, I still live, but thou, thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will. I can throw it to the dogs and to the birds of the air.[70]

Lastly, "Heine presented Herodias as a woman who was desirable precisely

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[70] Oscar Wilde, Salomé (New York: Three Sirens Press): 117.

because she was evil - as well as beautiful."[71] As we shall see, Beardsley's Salomé similarly combined sexual appeal with a desire to destroy (patriarchy).

Henri Regnault's Salomé (Figure 24) was the first painting in the late nineteenth century to depict a sadistic, self-indulgent, callous and thoroughly sensual Salomé.[72] Painted in 1869 when Regnault was in Italy, it was exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1870. Originally, this picture was intended as a study of the head of a young peasant girl Regnault had encountered in the Roman Campagna in March 1869. Despite the fact that Salomé was based upon this actual person, the artist's aesthetic motivation lay in the depiction of feminine nature as savage and cruel. So although Regnault considered titles like Hérodiade, Tête de faunesse, Esclave Favorite and Poetessa de Cordoba, he finally settled on Salomé because the painting depicted a sensual, young, Oriental woman who appeared disarranged as if from dancing, holding the large, gold basin and knife traditionally associated with the beheading of St. John the Baptist. Unlike the mythical Salomé which figured in Heine's Atta Troll and Beardsley's Climax, however, Regnault's Salomé was a real gypsy girl.[73] Some of Salomé's later popularity resulted, partly, from the wide acclaim received by Henri Regnault for his painting in the 1870 Salon. Hugo Daffner has suggested, for example, that "Flaubert thought of writing "Herodias" after he saw Regnault's painting in the Salon.[74]

Stéphane Mallarmé originally conceived his Hérodiade in 1864 as a

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[71] Jones and Kingsley: 107.

[72] Helen Grace Zagona, The Legend of Salomé and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake (Paris: Librairie E. Droz & Librairie Minard,1960): 91.

[73] Charles Sterling and Margaretta M. Salinger, French Paintings: A Catalogue of the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Volume: II XIX Century (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1966): 201.

[74] Hugo Daffner, Salomé: Ihre Gestalt in Geschichte und Kunst (Munich: Hugo Schmidt, 1912).

dramatic piece. Later it was modified into a poem containing three parts: "Ouverture ancienne de Hérodiade," "Scène," and "Cantique de Saint Jean." Again, although Mallarmé identified her as Herodias she was actually a Salomé figure. Once again the roles of mother and daughter seem to have been conflated.[75] In this case, the writer characterized Herodias as cold and aloof from those around her, noting that she had withdrawn from the secular world into a spiritual realm. Unlike Regnault's Salomé, Herodias did not represent a cruel and sensual temptress, rather she was described as pale, blond, unearthly and somewhat androgynous. She was not intended to entice men. In fact, Mallarmé mainly focused upon her virginity - a state so fragile that "Hérodiade tells the nurse that a kiss would kill her; indeed, she shrinks from even the slightest touch."[76] Her delicate beauty, then, was intended to evoke thoughts of sterility and death. Nevertheless the story, as told by Heine, still concluded with the young Herodias taking responsibility for the beheading of St. John the Baptist.

In his 1884 novel, A rebours, Joris-Karl Huysmans described both Moreau's Salomé dansant devant Hérode and his L'Apparition in highly elaborate terms which were intended to mirror Moreau's own sumptuous style of painting. Huysmans' main character, Des Esseints, had purchased these works with the view that they represented an absolute state of decadence. With this in mind, the author discussed Moreau's Salomé paintings in terms that went beyond their physical reality in the nineteenth century, describing them as active historical agents in order to stress the power of the works. Moreau's Salomé, for

[75] Although this confusion of identities was an inadvertent consequence of Heine's recasting of Herodias as Salomé in 1847, by Beardsley's day the maternal strength of Herodias had become a significant part of Salomé's character.

[76] Jones and Kingsley: 114.

example, was understood by Huysmans as "the symbolic incarnation of world-old Vice, the goddess of immortal Hysteria ... a monstrous Beast of the Apocalypse, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning, like Helen of Troy, all who come near her, all who see her, all who touch her."[77] Like Heine, Huysmans saw Salomé as both evil and desirable; the eternal femme fatale. Jules Laforgue's Salomé, however, functioned as a humorous response to such serious literary conceptions of the story. Critics like Helen Grace Zagona have suggested that Laforgue was deliberately making fun of Huysmans' extravagant language.[78] Laforgue's Salomé was a virgin and a spiritual philosopher who was attracted to Jokanaan, a socialist pamphleteer who had a red beard and glasses held together by a string. Rather than dancing, Salomé sung a song mocking philosophy and abstract theory which bored, not aroused, Herod's guests. An anticlimax occured when Salomé requested the head of Jokanaan and as no one objected she kissed it and threw it into the sea, an action which made her lose her balance and fall to her death onto the rocks below. (This death of Salomé parallelled her demise at the conclusion of Wilde's play, when Herod's guards crush her under their shields.) In the case of Laforgue's parody, the death of the heroine might have been a suggestion that the Salomé story had outlived its use.

With some sense of its historical evolution established, the Salomé theme as interpreted by Gustave Moreau in 1876 and Gustave Flaubert in 1877 will now be examined. The selection of these particular artists as this chapter's focus is due, in part, to their fame and popularity but, more importantly, it is due to their almost antithetical portrayals of Salomé. Whereas Moreau's Salomé

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[77] Joris-Karl Huysmans, A rebours (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1910): 74.
[78] Zagona: 103.

was a mysterious, timeless and otherworldly vision, Flaubert attempted a realistic characterization of this figure. Although both conceptions emphasized Salomé's role as a destructive temptress, the fact that Moreau's approach was rooted in Symbolist imagery and Flaubert's in New Realism naturally influenced their descriptions of the Salomé incident. That Flaubert's "Herodias" is a literary account and Moreau's Salomé a visual one is another obvious difference. Moreover, like Huysmans' and Heine's, Flaubert's drama positioned Salomé at the periphery of the main action. On the contrary, Moreau's Salomé was placed at the center of attention. Finally, their treatments of the story's conclusion differed radically.

Although Gustave Moreau's Salomé dansant devant Hérode and L'Apparition are astonishingly ornate in their details and backgrounds, this section will focus upon those elements significant to the portrayal of Salomé's character. Richly bedecked with jewels and streaming veils, Salomé stands motionless dominating both scenes. In effect, Moreau's sumptuous style underlines Salomé's sensuousness and artificiality: she is "no longer a real woman, she has become a surreal goddess."[79] Moreover, her icy, white flesh suggests death and otherworldliness. What was it about this destructive albeit beautiful woman that attracted artists like Moreau ? Initially, Moreau was drawn to this theme through his knowledge of French literature relating to the Orient, and specifically the writings of Chateaubriand. For Moreau, this writer conveyed Romantic qualities such as disenchantment, despair, the need to dream and the passion of faith. Consequently, Moreau's Salomé exuded a hopeless, Romantic sensibility and for Moreau became "an emblem of a terrible future, reserved for those who search for a nameless, sensual and unhealthily curious

[79] Jones and Kingsley: 113.

ideal."[80] In other words, Salomé's unwholesome desire to see St. John beheaded was meant to signify the universal truth about women: that they are ultimately responsible for all sin and all crime.[81] The artist chose Salomé because she was an evocative temptress, whose dance could be interpreted as the progress of a woman's life towards a destructive goal. In this respect, then, Moreau's particular interest in Salomé derived from his conviction that through this type of character he could best affirm his belief in the fatal threat that women posed.

Moreau's paintings are rooted in Symbolist theory because its timeless character sets the stage for the presentation of a universal truth. In the case of Salomé dansant devant Hérode the symbolism Moreau employed was, most likely, intended to underline Salomé's destructive power and to suggest her defeat by religion. For example, the statues of Diana, Ephesus, and the Persian goddess Mithras (situated above Herod's throne) are fertility symbols intended to highlight Salomé's sexual power. In the same area, the phallic column between Salomé and Herod combined with Salomé's linking gesture could be read as an objectification of the "transference of sexual power from man to woman."[82] In addition, the lotus in Salomé's right hand is an Indian symbol for female sexuality. Presumably, the panther behind Salomé is meant to stress her identification as a destructive temptress, since panthers are believed to entice men and animals to their doom by the sweetness of their breath. Similarly, Salomé's evocative dance convinces Herod to effect a deadly act. The sphinx in front of Salomé is another provocative and feminine creature

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[80] Julius Kaplan, The Art of Gustave Moreau: Theory, Style and Content (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 58): 58, as quoted from Gustave Moreau.

[81] Kaplan: 65.

[82] Kaplan: 60.

typically associated with the death of men. Salomé's own defeat is suggested by the eye-shaped pendant hanging from her bracelet, a symbol of divine intervention. In other words, Moreau is suggesting that the absolute power of faith will eventually overcome Salomé whose sexuality is no match for providence. According to Zagona, this defeat is described in L'Apparition as the "absence of triumph" in the presence of fear.[83] Following the decapitation, St. John's severed head appears before Salomé who recoils and raises her hand in an attempt to repulse the horrible apparition. She fears the vision, but most of all she is tormented by the "realization of the enormity of her deed."[84] Moreau enhanced this horrific scene by contrasting St. John's sorrowful face with Salomé's expression of revulsion and by freezing a fearful Salomé in motion while those around her look on with impassive expressions. In this version of the Salomé story, she is cast as selfish and made to suffer severely.

Gustave Flaubert's realistic work "Hérodias," however, takes a quite different approach to the Salomé tale. Like Regnault, whose image of Salomé is based upon an actual young peasant, Flaubert's interest in Salomé is provoked by an occasion in 1850 when he spent a night in Esneh with an Egyptian courtesan, Ruchiouck-Hânem. The author's highly detailed description of Salomé's dance is commonly attributed to a dance this prostitute performed for him.[85] Some other factors which inspired Flaubert to write "Hérodias" were the thirteenth century tympanum of the Cathedral at Rouen

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[83] Zagona: 93.

[84] Ibid.

[85] It is interesting to note that Flaubert's account of Salomé's dance in "Hérodias" also quite accurately describes Beardsley's The Stomach Dance (Figure 1). "With her eyes half-closed, she twisted her body backwards and forwards, making her belly rise and fall and her breasts quiver, while her face remained expressionless and her feet never stopped moving." See Gustave Flaubert, Three Tales (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965): 121.

depicting Salomé dancing on her hands before Herod and the execution scenes as well as the author's recent rereading of both the Bible and Ernest Renan's Vie de Jésus which recounts the Baptist incident in fairly historically accurate terms. Zagona notes, moreover, that Flaubert first mentioned his intention to write "Hérodias" in April of 1876, the same month that he attended the Paris Salon where Moreau's Salomé paintings were displayed.[86] Despite this probable familiarity with Moreau, however, Flaubert confronted the Salomé theme from a different perspective. The author wrote "Hérodias" only after researching all historical, social, racial and religious sources, with the result that the Salomé incident comes as close as possible to historical accuracy. Because he wanted this historical subject to be set in a real place and time, he carefully consulted every description in ancient and modern texts. Of course, "Hérodias" was a work of fiction and the author enhanced history when it did not fit his intended effect.[87] By these means, Flaubert attempted to recreate an actual "moment from the ancient world of the Bible" albeit, with artistic value.[88] The moments most interesting to us are those featuring Salomé. Initially, in a conversation with Herod, Herodias covertly alludes to Salomé as the daughter she abandoned for his sake. Soon after, a young, unidentified woman appears on a roof near Herod's citadel; her face is hidden but her body arouses his desire. She makes another anonymous appearance in Herodias' room where Herod's eye catches a young woman's arm reaching through a curtain for a tunic. Finally, Salomé enters Herod's banquet and dances, an event which induces a mesmerized Herod to promise her anything. She requests the head

[86] Zagona: 70.

[87] A. W. Raitt, Flaubert: Trois Contes (London: Grant and Cutler Ltd., 1991): 60.

[88] Zagona: 69.

of St. John which, being granted, she brings to Herodias in the gallery. Particularly in the final scenes of this tale the author created an incredibly realistic effect. This is apparent in Salomé's dance, which Flaubert descibes in every detail of costume and movement, in the "men who watch her ... flaring their nostrils and palpitating in their lust for her,"[89] in the banquet guest who vomits throughout the feast and in the heaviness of the head which three men carry to the shore of Galilee. In this fashion, Flaubert conveyed a fairly vivid impression of a living Salomé.

One aspect of Flaubert's tale which differentiates it from most other late nineteenth century treatments of this theme is Salomé's character. Like the New Testament Salomé, she is an innocent, albeit sensual, pawn in her mother's scheme to defeat St. John the Baptist. Salomé is "a docile girl who follows a maternal order without question."[90] She is not personally motivated by love or lust, rather she is brought in by Herodias knowing that Herod would fall in love with her. Her innocence, which is briefly obscured by the sexual lust Salomé excites in Herod and his guests by her seductive and lascivious dance, reappears afterwards in the childishness of her speech and her inability to remember St. John's name. In this case, it is Herodias who embodies the power and advances the storyline. A storyline, I might add, which was not only accurate in its historical details but also in its relation to late nineteenth century gender politics. Indeed, the sexual struggle which takes place in "Hérodias" seems to echo the Second Empire man's fear of female domination. In Flaubert's story Herodias uses sexuality to achieve her goals. First, when Herodias was still a young and attractive woman, by winning Herod's love away

[89] Jones and Kingsley: 111.

[90] Zagona: 78.

from his first wife and, again, when she uses Salomé to induce Herod to behead St. John. Basically, even men like Herod, despite their political position, are the weak and "legitimate prey of strong-willed, attractive women."[91] Flaubert analyzed how this weakness was exploited by Herodias who triumphed over her husband and St. John through sheer, sexual force. Since Salomé was merely dismissed following the execution, Herodias' victory appears to serve as the story's climax. Indeed, the typical late nineteenth century ending, in which Salomé pays for her actions, is absent. Instead Flaubert created an "unexpected decresendo" which describes a forsaken image of three men alternately carrying a heavy head across the desert.[92] Despite "Hérodias'" quiet ending, Flaubert's study of the Salomé theme was motivated by the same principle as Heine's, Regnault's and Moreau's: that is, a late nineteenth century fear of the decline of patriarchal culture which can be seen as a response to the growing calls for female independence. Such a gender struggle was played out in various manifestations of "Salomé" from this time including the illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley which appear to address the femme fatale specifically - a notion taken up extensively in chapter four.

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[91] John Fletcher, A Critical Commentary on Flaubert's 'Trois Contes' (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968): 68.

[92] Raitt: 73.

CHAPTER THREE

'SALOME' AND THE POPULAR PRESS

The formation of a mass culture in Britain in the 1880s and 1890s must be understood in relation to the growth of the popular press. In the late nineteenth century a revolution in communication occurred wherein news, opinions, and social and political views were disseminated throughout city and country via a cheaper and more direct journalism. In effect, what amounted to a nationalization of political and social ideas was achieved through the mass circulation of the press, combined with the practice of international travel and the establishment of a railway network centred in London. The number and circulation of newspapers increased so dramatically, as a result of cheaper paper and improved production techniques, that by 1889, 129 daily papers were available outside London alone, and by 1900 there were approximately 50 different women's magazines while family journals were consumed by 900,000 per week.[93] Moreover, magazines and newspapers were designed to appeal to different groups, becoming in themselves 'consumer products' reaching millions and influencing every class of consumer to some degree.

The extent of the presses' influence was evident in the wide ranging topics discussed within its pages. Its breadth of topics, however, contrasted with its rather narrow range of conventional opinion. This was particularly true when it came to attitudes towards gender and sexuality which, for the most part, were decidedly patriarchal and tended to perpetuate rather than question traditional values. Attitudes towards popular topics such as fashion, the roles of men and women in modern society, and sexuality were shaped by stereotypical

[93] T. R. Nevett, Advertising in Britain (London: Heinemann, 1982): 78.

bourgeois definitions of propriety rather than reflecting the surrounding climate of social change. Consequently, the popular press' socially manipulative design worked to nationalize social and political opinion, a process wherein ideas were rapidly received, consumed and understood, with the result that individual inclinations to form independent opinions were inhibited.[94]

Not only did the press function as a medium which generated social opinion, it was also a vehicle for advertisement. By situating advertisements in the pages of these popular publications a certain credibility was conferred on products. Between 1875 and 1900 the "branding" of foods and other products in press advertising insured that readers easily identified the products with their manufacturers.[95] One popular method of advertising was the illustrated poster which, in 1870, could be produced in colour by lithography.[96] Initially, the brand name was often paired with a well known work of art which had little in common with the product. For example, in 1886, Pears' used a well known academic painting by Sir John Millais of a boy blowing bubbles to advertise its' soap (Figure 25). By 1894 the passion for poster collecting peaked as evidenced by a number of poster exhibitions which suggests that the poster had become one of the most popular art forms of the 1890s. This popularity led to the formation of a censorship committee in 1890 which was intended to control the production of designs "impure in suggestion, ultra-sensational, or offensive to religious susceptibilities."[97] The poster, then, became the first advertising medium with its

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[94] Above all, Beardsley recognized the powerful role the popular press had in terms of creating a mass culture, whose beliefs were formed through a dependence on magazines and newspapers. As we shall see, he used his own artistic practice to comment upon the persuasive power of popular culture.

[95] Nevett: 84.

[96] Nevett: 87.

[97] Nevett: 123.

own formalized system of self-regulation. This manner of censorship probably intrigued Beardsley whose controversial designs for Salomé, as discussed in chapter one, challenged the publishers' ability to locate and delete obscene details. Furthermore, this popular art form would have appealed to Beardsley's interests both personally, as an excellent medium through which to publicly promote himself and his work, and also in terms of providing him with subject matter for some of his Salomé drawings. A typical case in point was the artist's fascination with and critique of commercial fashions and beauty products.[98] Specific instances of Beardsley's critique of advertising will be taken up later in this chapter.

As well as censorship in advertising there was a similar system of regulation for the press. Following the Education Act of 1876 which extended the literacy rate among the lower classes came arguments favouring the increase of censorship and control of the mass press. In other words, the Education Act greatly assisted the formation of a new reading public which disconcerted England's traditional cultural elite. According to Alan J. Lee in his Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914, however, "the ability to read ... was no guarantee as to the quality, content, or effect of what was read."[99] The popular press, then, not only perpetuated and indoctrinated certain traditional notions, but the system of censorship that controlled the press denied the public access to alternative or oppositional points of view.

Following this brief study of the popular press as a medium for the

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[98] It should be noted how again and again Beardsley positioned himself as both critic and exploiter of the system, an ambivalent attitude which will be demonstrated throughout this thesis.

[99] Alan J. Lee, The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1976): 29.

creation of a mass culture, I will turn to a discussion of the ways in which Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé engaged with each of the issues I have raised. Specifically, I will examine the relationship between the popular press and Beardsley's designs for Wilde's play and consider the drawings as both a product and a critique of the late Victorian press. As we shall see, the artist used popular images found in the press and on posters to comment upon fashion, gender distinctions, sexuality and the perpetuation of certain outmoded beliefs. Moreover, Beardsley presented for public consideration a number of issues, such as subversion and censorship, that were usually repressed in the pages of the press. However, Beardsley's critiques extend beyond merely being the artist's personal opinions of mainstream society's habits and tastes. Rather, his illustrations comment upon the press itself as a socially manipulative medium designed to inhibit the questioning of certain social conventions.[100]

First of all, it is important to realize that Beardsley made his images 'popular.' Taking advantage of the public's familiarity with black-and-white advertising imagery, the artist fashioned his illustrations after those in the pages of the press. By adopting an already familiar black-and-white colour scheme the artist presented his viewers with images which were ostensibly easy to read. And yet he added to these apparently simple images a new twist or offensiveness which demanded the reader's attention. In this respect it might be argued that by attracting the public's eye in order to sell his own products and ideas the artist borrowed his techniques from the advertising medium. Beardsley, however, turned the tools of the advertising trade against itself by using the shock tactics of the advertiser to question the very beliefs that the

[100] In chapter four, 'Salomé' and Other Images of the New Woman, however, the reader will see how the New Woman, a fairly radical persona, found her way into the pages of the press during the women's movement in late nineteenth century Britain.

press and mainstream society sought to perpetuate. In Beardsley's art the standard image is 'infected' with a certain offensiveness which deliberately upsets conventional myths concerning women's roles and various expressions of sexuality. It should be noted that Beardsley's position was fraught with ambiguities. While on the one hand, he criticized commercialism, traditionalism and the repression of the popular press, on the other he reaped the benefits of this very medium. Indeed, Beardsley's use of the popular presses' familiar visual schema, specifically its stereotypical representations of women, was probably exactly what attracted the public's attention to Salomé's bold black-and-white designs and hyper-fashionable images of women.

Three drawings from Salomé will be examined in terms of their correspondences with popular images and issues in the press. The Black Cape will address fashion and the sexual objectification of women, The Toilette of Salomé (I and II) will be considered in relation to the consumption of beauty products and the notion of woman as ornament, and lastly, The Stomach Dance will be analyzed in the context of sexuality and censorship. Finally, Aubrey Beardsley's relationship with the poster as both an art form and an advertising medium will be explored, especially as this relationship sheds light on his self-critical use of media for promoting himself and his art.

In 1982, Edward Hodnett described The Black Cape as an exaggeration of current fashion which had no place in a Biblical play.[101] Similar comments had been made thirty-four years earlier by R. A. Walker in The Best of Beardsley where he defined The Black Cape as a caricature of 1894 fashions with no connection to the play.[102] However, apart from Percy Muir's assertion that

[101] Hodnett: 234.

[102] Walker: 11.

The Black Cape was substituted by Beardsley for another unacceptable illustration as an act of revenge and Arthur Symons' very brief characterization of the drawing as irreverent, very little has been said about this dramatic image of a woman in a swirling black gown decorated with stars and blossoms.[103]

To begin with the issues at hand we should question assertions that separate this 'fashion plate' from the story and its' illustrations. Is it indeed so different in attitude from the Toilette of Salomé II, for example, since both identify women as objects of fuss and fashion ? Moreover, when viewed in context of the illustrations as a set the reader should recognize The Black Cape as more than just a humorous caricature of contemporary fashion. More to the point is the fact that The Black Cape addresses the notion of female objectification as understood within the context of the 1890s. Furthermore, while The Black Cape is not in any sense Biblical, neither is Wilde's play. According to David Allen King, "the historical Salomé becomes a vehicle for the artist's perception of the femme fatale theme, [and] ... this contemporary notion of the domineering woman ... was overlaid on a famous Biblical story."[104] The case of The Black Cape, therefore, is one example of a work which should never have been so easily dismissed by critics, since a deeper investigation reveals that Beardsley was parodying the fashionable middle-class feminine ideal which was widely promoted in the press of the period.

Turning to investigate a typical example of such fashionable ideals, one might turn to To-Day's "Feminine Affairs" of February 10, 1894, which was a collection of nine separate descriptions of attire either worn by such fashionable

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[103] Muir: 183, Symons: 35.

[104] David A. King, Salomé: A Multi-Dimensional Theme in European Art 1840-1945 (Ann Arbor, Michigan (Thesis dissertation), 1986): 243.

individuals as "Mrs. Beerbohm Tree [who] wears a perfectly sweet white silk gown" to advice about the muff which "no doubt ... during the next few months ... will be worn rather large."[105] One might think that being the only column in this magazine devoted to women, some other more expedient issues should be addressed. But pressing issues such as the emergence of the New Woman and the reformation of mainstream attitudes towards gender and sexuality had no place in this superficial exhortation of feminine beauty. In fact, an obsession with the details of each gown down to the "three rows of jet trimming across the top of the hem" reveals the mass media's intention to overwhelm the female reader with minute facts, thereby keeping her mind from straying toward the more radical issues of her day.[106] Throughout "Feminine Affairs" the reader is indoctrinated by significant phrases which run through each description and reinforce the importance of appearance. Such remarks include: "made to fit admirably to the charming figure, ... naturally we don our smartest costumes for this pretty meeting, ... smartness must not be sacrificed to comfort, and when a girl has spent months in cultivating a tiny waist she cannot be expected to hide it under a warm winter wrap, ... [and] what is the use of having a pretty complexion if one cannot make the best of it by choosing the most becoming veil that can be procured ?"[107] Although there are, in fact, too many examples to recount, such comments indicate that the popular press thought this exclusive devotion to appearance was both normal and natural for women. Only if we understand that the manner in the which the female is described and portrayed in the press significantly shaped mainstream Victorian women's tastes and opinions

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[105] "Feminine Affairs," To-Day (London, February 10, 1894): 26.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

regarding fashion and the formation of self-perception, can we truly recognize the power of the mass media. This appeal to the feminine ego indicates that women were considered more valuable for their beauty than for their intelligence. In effect, the ideal woman was defined as an object of elegance and grace to be admired by her family and friends.

From another perspective, however, Beardsley's Black Cape provides evidence to suggest that he saw this sort of fashionable banter as a destructive force, binding women to a distorted perception of feminine innocence. In his illustration the female is almost completely besieged by a gown which denies the possibility of a normal human body beneath its' sharp and swirling black forms. Apart from the hands, face and navel the woman barely exists beyond functioning as a hanger for the display of this dynamic dress. The violence of its' shapes and movements appear to overpower the underlying female form as if the gown embodied the popular press itself, pushing and prodding the woman into its' ideal of female beauty. What Beardsley sets before the reader, then, is more than an 1894 fashion plate: it is a recognition that the press' attitude is so highly persuasive that no one questions the validity of its' opinions and its positioning of women as objects whose intelligence is hidden beneath their exquisite gowns. One might conclude, therefore, that The Black Cape functioned as Beardsley's commentary on the myth of the ideal woman whose inner life is obscured by an over-emphasis on objectification.

In a similarly critical way, Aubrey Beardsley's Toilette of Salomé proposes a critique of the late nineteenth century passion for cosmetics, a circumstance no doubt stimulated by the extensive number of beauty publications and products newly appearing on the market. Similar to the way in

which fashionable attire was urged upon the fin-de-siecle lady, the art of beauty was prescribed to "the plain, unadorned, weary, and too natural woman [eager] ... to preserve the admiration of her husband."[108] In the words of "the world renowned Doctor Erasmus Wilson, ... a bad complexion will immediately place its' possessor in an unfavourable light and blind the eye to every good quality, either of features or intellect ... anybody with the proper kind of pride should shrink from placing herself in such a position as to require her friends ... with the necessity of apologizing even to themselves, for her bad complexion ... love and admiration are the two great wants in every woman's nature, and beauty alone can aid them in being loved and admired."[109] At the time this was written near the end of the century cosmetic establishments had increased to 261 from the 39 establishments operating in 1849. Furthermore, cosmetic sales totalled £ 500 per year.[110] (Figures 26, 27 and 28 are typical examples of some cosmetic advertising in the press.)

Moreover, not only was the cultivation of a beautiful appearance important, but the elegant decoration of the lady's dressing room was also necessary for the creation of a tastefully made-up face. Several beauty publications devoted whole chapters to describing the ideal surroundings for the toilette from "the walls ... covered with tiles of blue, pink, or sea green," and the chandelier lit especially for evening toilettes, to larger and smaller dressing tables which held the "water pitcher and bowl of porcelain ... [and] the delicate perfumes, creams, and lotions," respectively. [111] This quote is barely a taste of

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[108] Richard Corson, Fashions in Makeup: From Ancient to Modern Times (New York: Universe Books, 1972): 362 & 366.

[109] Corson: 371.

[110] Corson: 386.

[111] Corson: 362-365, as quoted from Baroness Blanche A. Staffe, My Lady's Dressing Room (Cassell, 1892).

what almost constitutes treatises on the subject in these publications, recalling the way fashion critics in ladies' periodicals had burdened their readers with an overabundance of detail in order to deter them from seeking any fulfilment beyond the cultivation of their own beauty. However, if Dr. Wilson's statement that beauty alone can initiate feelings of love and admiration in members of the opposite sex, can one criticize women's obsession with appearances ? And yet despite the fact that women were often viewed as merè ornaments in the separate sphere of the home, such attitudes were slowly being called into question by a rising number of women who believed they were intelligent members of a changing society.

Beardsley's Toilette, like The Black Cape, seems to perpetuate tradition by presenting women as objects of fuss and fashion who are entirely too concerned with their appearances. On first glance, in both illustrations the artist presents images of silly, self-centered young women sitting before ornate dressing tables covered with an assortment of "cold cream jars, ointment pots, turned wood boxes, ... a variety of bottles ... powder puffs ... perfumes, colognes, toilet waters, and depilatories."[112] Natural light is provided by windows revealed beneath "cream-hued ... window curtains [which] underlie those of cretonne," in order that the optimum effects of make-up application are achieved.[113] In both instances Salomé is attended by Pierrot who powders her hair after the fashion of eighteenth century French women.[114] The presence of Pierrot is all the more significant with respect to the practice of enamelling the face which not only prohibited facial expressions for fear of cracking the porcelain, but also made a

[112] Corson: 367, as quoted from Margaret Cunliffe-Owen, Eve's Glossary (Chicago and New York: Herbert Stone & Co., 1897).

[113] Ibid.

[114] This eighteenth century reference significantly refers to a century of artifice.

woman's "complexion livid in the daytime."[115] According to Annie Wolf in The Truth About Beauty, it was very undesirable to resemble Pierrot and, with regard to powder, this beauty critic warned that over-powdering your face like a clown's looked ridiculous.[116]

Beardsley's Pierrot, then, might be read as cautioning the female public that the beauty media plays too significant a role in the social construction of femininity, influencing the way women look and function in society. In other words, behind every middle-class woman stands a Pierrot, careful never to remain too much before her eyes as in Beardsley's Toilette, guiding her tastes and opinions. Max Beerbohm parodies this late nineteenth century fascination in his Defence of Cosmetics, 1894, when he says that "of all good things that will happen with the full revival of cosmetics, one of the best is that surface will finally be severed from soul ... Too long has the face been degraded from its rank as a thing of beauty to a mere vulgar index of character and emotion ... And the use of cosmetics, the masking of the face, will change this [and] ... We shall gaze at a woman merely because she is beautiful."[117] Evidently, Aubrey Beardsley's Toilette(s) of Salomé were created in the same spirit as Beerbohm's essay which suggests that this obsession with appearances could be interpreted as ludicrous. The parodic elements of Beardsley's illustrations include exaggerated visions of pampered female figures such as a statuesque Herodias (Figure 6) attended by a rosette trimmed ghoul inspecting the Queens's gown and a naked page holding a powderpuff and sponge, and a

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[115] Corson: 377, as quoted from Annie Wolf, The Truth About Beauty (New York: Lovell, Coryell & Co., 1892).

[116] Ibid.

[117] Max Beerbohm, Defence of Cosmetics (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1894). It is not certain whether Beerbohm's essay is serious or parodic, however there is much evidence from reviews of the Yellow Book where the essay was first published that it annoyed his readers.

lifeless Salomé (Figure 21) whose slim figure is dwarfed by an enormous powderpuff suggesting excessive vanity. Of course, this issue was not so simple. After all, both Beardsley and Beerbohm were themselves obsessed with fashion and appearances as part of the distinguishing feature of their decadent subculture. While we acknowledge the drawing's element of parody which suggests a feminist reading of Beardsley's Toilette(s) of Salomé and Beerbohm's Defence of Cosmetics, their attitudes towards women were much more ambivalent. As dandy figures in a homosexual subculture, they were fascinated by eighteenth century culture and artifice and, consequently, captivated by cosmetics. From another perspective, however, the illustrations and essay might be seen as describing women as superficial and weak. The Black Cape (Figure 3) and Enter Herodias, for example, depict women proudly wearing gowns which completely hinder movement and push chests up to shoulders, suggesting that women gladly sacrifice comfort for fashion. In effect, neither man's position on this issue is clear, a circumstance, no doubt, quite deliberately fostered on their part.

The Stomach Dance stands out as one of Beardsley's most tantalizing visions of female sexuality. Indeed, this illustration presents notions of sexual lust and desire in such an explicit fashion that as early as 1927, Haldane Macfall was shocked that "the lasciviousness of the musician ... offended nobody's eye."[118] In my opinion, The Stomach Dance is Beardsley's most successful critique of mainstream Victorian morals. While these issues will be taken up extensively in the next two chapters, at this point it is useful to consider how this image engages with the popular press's handling of certain new sexual freedoms and expressions. Here Beardsley's powerful image takes its

[118] Macfall: 101.

dramatic scheme from the pages of the press, but rather than using the beautiful young woman to sell creams, soaps or pills (Figures 26, 27 & 28) the artist reveals the 'spokesperson' behind the product. Salomé represents only herself in an attempt to accustom the reader to the idea of an independent woman in control of her life, capable in mind and body of assuming a fulfilling role in society. Moreover, The Stomach Dance addresses the notion that women too have sexual drives which are not deviant but natural. In fact, if the outburst of curvilinear forms from between Salomé's thighs is understood as orgasmic it suggests an awareness that no fewer than forty percent of middle-class women occasionally had orgasms, according to one nineteenth century survey.[119]

However, surveys of this nature were not often published in popular publications of the To-Day variety where current events, gossip columns and short stories were the staple fare. In the 'proper' world of the mass media, the notion of female sexual desire was unmentionable. In fact, publications by several British purity movements set out to counter "a sense that society was being swamped by the erotic" with allegations that anything beyond their definition of virtuous love was perverted and had grave medical consequences.[120] Another attempt to replace "impious literature," the imaginary, and the sensational novel, was made by those who promoted the distribution of the religious tract which "was everywhere in nineteenth century England."[121] Of course the most powerful propaganda formulation was the idealization of the Victorian woman as a lovely, gentle wife and mother, ignorant of the world

[119] Ellen Carol Dubois and Linda Gordon, "Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Sexual Thought," Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality, edited by Carol C. Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984): 36.

[120] Edward J. Bristow, Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700 (Totowa, New Jersey: Gill and Macmillan, Rowman and Littlefield, 1977): 200.

[121] Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900 (University of Chicago Press, 1957): 103.

beyond her domestic duties (Figure 29). It was in opposition to these myths that Beardsley created The Stomach Dance. This image of a dancing woman forces the reader to recognize that which is usually repressed in the popular press.

Another way in which Aubrey Beardsley took up mass imagery was his interest in advertising, particularly posters. The artist was not opposed to the advertisement in principle which was merely a vehicle for selling products and ideas. In fact, the advertising poster as a medium for the promotion of an artist like himself and for the beautification of the modern city appealed to him. It should be recalled that he had exploited the poster's advantages to publicize Salomé in bookstore windows.[122] I would like to suggest, rather, that Beardsley was opposed to the poster's elevation into an art form "to be hung on a room's wall or in a picture gallery to perplex an artless public."[123] In The Art of the Hoarding, Beardsley stated that posters were artforms for the streets, which "take part in everyday existence," rather than for picture galleries which only promote art to a select few.[124] Following this, one expects Salomé's illustrations to function either autonomously as fine art, or else as poster images designed specifically to publicize the book. However, in the case of the Salomé illustrations there was no such clear-cut division. Instead, Beardsley's images appear to have functioned as advertisements promoting themselves as

[122] Salomé was advertised by John Lane as "the play the Lord Chamberlain refused to license," in an attempt to cash in on the sensationalism of the book's reputation, according to James G. Nelson, The Early Nineties: A View from Bodley Head (Harvard University Press, 1971): 237. It should also be noted that although art historians, like Miriam Benkovitz in 1981, have suggested that a new Title-page was requested by Lane because the original conception was "hardly appropriate for use as a poster in book-store windows" (p. 84), I have found neither a description nor an illustrated poster for advertising Salomé in any publication. I can only surmise, therefore, that the new title-page served as Salomé's official announcement.

[123] Aubrey Beardsley, "The Art of the Hoarding," New Review (July, 1894): 53.

[124] Ibid.

independent artforms separate from Wilde's text. As we shall see, in this respect, the artist may well have drawn his inspiration from certain advertisements of the period.

As previously discussed, many late Victorian posters simply reproduced famous works of art rather than offering creative new designs. Such was the case with both the Pears' Soap advertisement as well as one for 'Alexandra' Dentifrice which used a portrait of Princess Alexandra (Figure 30).[125] Despite the fact that such pictures clearly related to the product being sold, the poster's pictorial element often maintained a separation from the text which, perhaps, confused prospective consumers. However, the pairing did succeed in making art accessible to the public, especially since the image often superseded the message. In fact, the Victorian rage for poster collecting was more concerned with the artistic merit of the poster than the product promoted. Perhaps following this trend, Beardsley's images were to a large degree unrelated to Wilde's text and seemed to silence the story through their sheer drama and visual impact which drew upon the dramatic colour schemes of advertising posters which were already familiar to the public.[126] Moreover, one might argue that the artist utilized the poster's ambiguous format when he produced images which were independent of Wilde's text, much as advertisers sometimes paired disparate pictures with products. Was Beardsley claiming that his pictures possessed an autonomous artistic status ? In Beardsley's case the separation of image and text provoked negative reactions from critics who

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[125] Geoffrey and Diana Hindley, Advertising in Victorian England 1837-1901 (London: Wayland Publishers, 1972): C. 1 & 6.10.

[126] Moreover, by overloading his images with meaning Beardsley was further denying the possibility of their exclusive dependence on the text. For example, The Peacock Skirt recalls popular images of fashion plates in order to call attention to the objectification and idealization of women.

disliked the fact that Beardsley deviated from Wilde's play by overwhelming and disregarding the actual text. Certainly, the traditional subservience of image to text and artist to writer threatened Beardsley's prospects for fame and recognition. Perhaps Beardsley's action was read as an attempt to overcome his junior relationship to a more senior and more famous author. Indeed, Wilde's renown was so great at this time that the young artist feared the public would overlook his illustrations entirely. It was probable, therefore, that in the case of Salomé, the artist deliberately promoted his illustrations as an 'art' that was separate from Wilde's play. In a Sketch interview Beardsley justified the separation of image and literary text (in the Yellow Book) when he noted that when "art is made the handmaid of literature - that art is placed on a lower level ... [and] we want to put literature and art on precisely the same level."[127]

In spite of this internal power struggle, as a book, Salomé made a great impression on the late nineteenth century literary scene, as we saw in chapter one. The success of Beardsley's format was indebted to the audience's familiarity with the mainstream press. Knowing the artist's ambivalent relationship to the 'popular,' however, it was hardly surprising that Salomé assumed a controversial position, highly critical of the popular press. But before we can appreciate Beardsley's commentary on the commercialism of the mainstream press we must examine the development of the book trade in the 1890s and its' role in the formation of a mass culture. Until the 1890s the retailing of books was strictly regulated by the publishing houses who kept the prices high, the volume low and restricted the production of soft-cover books. However, following the Education Act which increased literacy and a period of

[127] Aubrey Beardsley, "What the Yellow Book is to Be: Some Meditations With its Editors," Sketch (April 11, 1894): 557.

economic progress between 1860 and 1890 when incomes grew and leisure became more widely available, publishers were encouraged to decrease their prices and make literature accessible to the middle-classes.[128] By utilizing less expensive materials and more effective production technology, publishers were able to reduce prices and increase the availability of books which, in turn, stimulated the public's desire to read. Like the newspaper and the periodical, the book trade increasingly catered to the popular interests of the general reading public. Most frequently demanded were sensational Romances by such authors as Anthony Trollope. Illustrations became a vital feature of such books as well as of those periodicals such as the English Illustrated Magazine which published numerous romantic illustrated stories that also appealed to a mass audience.[129] Oscar Wilde's Salomé, with its illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley, was fashioned after this kind of escapist literature which was characterized by exotic content and design. However, despite the fact that Salomé took its form from popular books in order to attract readers, its intent was critical rather than popularizing. In this case the familiar format of the illustrations was intended to function as a commentary on newer social issues not ordinarily found in novels and gossipy periodicals. For example, Beardsley was involved with radically deconstructing prevailing mythologies by exploring the emergence of the New Woman in mainstream society. Beardsley's Salomé illustrations confronted this and other issues overlooked or mythologized by the popular press, such as abortion and homosexuality, in order to educate the public and initiate social change. While examples of Salomé's controversial representations will be taken up in detail in chapters four and five, needless to

[128] Altick: 306.

[129] Altick: 307-308.

say, such sexually explicit images alarmed publishers and censors.

Self-censorship within the book trade, as discussed in chapter one, was employed by certain publishers who did not want their products prosecuted after they had paid for the expense of their manufacture. Other publishers, like Lane and Mathews, seized upon the issue of censorship as an opportunity for creating a sensation and thereby increasing sales of Salomé. Persons involved with the censorship of books often held a position in society which allowed them to define which reading material would properly serve the preservation of the status quo.[130] By restricting public consumption to those works not judged immoral or socially radical, they maintained a strict control over society's morals. One of the most zealous defenders of proper taste and morality was the owner of Mudie's Select Library, the largest circulating library in the country. One of the ways in which access to literature was regulated was though the mechanism of the lending library which was extremely powerful since most Victorian novel readers borrowed rather than purchased their books. Despite the enormous demand for novels, Mr. Mudie refused to allow even slightly immoral works. By 1860, 65 to 90 % of books circulated were fiction and the demand for melodrama was insatiable.[131] However, according to Richard D. Altick, this desire for sensationalism and sentimental fiction was "considered evil and unwholesome." In 1891 it was determined that crimes were the result of "the disordered imagination of the reader of sensational rubbish," and the home and family were being neglected by "the novel reading wife."[132] Such reasoning reflected prevailing attitudes towards sexual expression and gender roles and was also used by the press as arguments against any form of modern social

[130] Altick: 85.

[131] Altick: 231.

[132] Altick: 232.

reconstruction. Thus we can see publishers experienced a serious conflict of interest which pitted what the public wanted for their amusement against what they needed for their moral good.

In this sense Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé provided an interesting solution to this dilemma by giving the reading public the sensationalism it desired, albeit in a format which invited self-analysis. For instance, the reader of Salomé was presented with a vision of the New Woman in control of her own sexuality which questioned some of the myths surrounding mainstream forms of sexual expression. In other words, rather than denying his readers radical and sensational elements, Beardsley positively encouraged them to look closely at these elements and to consider them critically in order to realize new possibilities in a modern world.

CHAPTER FOUR

'SALOME' AND OTHER IMAGES OF THE NEW WOMAN

In his Salomé illustrations Aubrey Beardsley took up ideas and imagery related to the debates surrounding the New Woman of the 1890s who was defined (albeit often negatively) in popular art and literature as a woman in control of her own sexuality. His characterization of Wilde's Salomé as a New Woman was significant because it identified the modern woman with the femme fatale by transforming the well known Biblical character discussed in chapter two. Historically, Salomé was most often portrayed as the instrument through which Herodias effected the murder of St. John the Baptist. Until the nineteenth century Salomé functioned merely as a tool for revenge in the hands of her mother. However, during the nineteenth century conceptions of the story became increasingly blurred by writers such as Gustave Flaubert and artists such as Gustave Moreau who, by switching the roles of mother and daughter, made Salomé the principal player. This was particularly evident in Oscar Wilde's play of 1894 in which Salomé not only played the lead, but was recast as an 1890s New Woman.

However, it should be stressed that social reactions to the New Woman were not always positive. Given patriarchy's deep roots in late nineteenth century English culture, the notion of female equality was regarded uneasily by some who questioned the wisdom of such an idea. Not that feminism was completely rejected by the status quo, rather it was viewed with suspicion and a certain ambivalence, particularly in press imagery from the period. Indeed, much of the popular imagery surrounding this issue was interpreted as a cynical

form of commentary on female emancipation. For example, Beardsley's dangerous, mysterious and cruel Salomé was probably read by some as the embodiment of mainstream perceptions that the emancipated Victorian woman was some sort of femme fatale.[133] To such defenders of patriarchy it probably appeared that Beardsley was adopting the most extreme form of middle-class resistance towards the liberalization of female rights. Here it is worth pausing to consider how such resistances towards the idea of the modern woman had developed. At the peak of the social revolution in the 1890s the notion of an independent and intelligent woman was perceived as a threat to bourgeois ideologies which situated the wife and mother at the centre of a stable, moral society. One way to deal with the threat of the independent woman was to recast her as a promiscuous and alluring femme fatale. Such a transformation enabled certain sectors of the public to reject the modern woman's demands which, in their eyes, could only lead to the destruction of middle-class ideals. Another strategy for coping with such women was the creation of a less sophisticated modern woman who typically appeared in popular journalism and illustration. Indeed, the typical women of short stories and illustrations conformed more closely to conventional Victorian expectations and exhibited only subtle tendencies toward sexual liberation. In effect, such stories coped with these women by depicting their struggles for independence within the context of a society love affair or by convincing the reader that women were unable to resolve romantic dilemmas, let alone make important political decisions.

Before we look at popular conceptions of New Women in the press and

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[133] Susan P. Casteras, Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987): 171.

their relationship to Beardsley's representations of women, an introduction to the debates surrounding the women's movement in the late nineteenth century is needed. Let us begin by looking at the modern woman in context of the new social/sexual freedoms that resulted from legislation in the 1880s which restructured sexual policies and significantly altered middle-class Victorian society.[134] Since the family circle was regarded as the keystone of a healthy bourgeois society, "the New Woman who left home and family for a career," was seen as a danger to the domestic foundation of middle-class existence.[135] Departing from her traditional role as wife and mother, the late nineteenth century woman threatened the sexual division which divided middle-class existence into separate spheres casting the male as 'master of the house' and 'breadwinner.' Stepping into the public sphere, the New Woman was perceived as neglecting her home, family and motherhood. As a result the "protection of the family [became] a highly charged political issue in the 1890s" and the modern woman was frequently labelled an "Amazon."[136] In Fraser Harrison's words, between 1873 and 1896 the "principal battles for female emancipation were fought and won."[137] Previously, women had had few rights and their lives had been (more or less) carefully governed by their husbands or their families. However, by 1890, women had achieved several important goals which contributed to the control of their own lives. For example, after the new reforms, at the time of marriage a wife retained her own property instead of it being automatically transferred to her husband's ownership. Moreover, she was now

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[134] Casteras: 166.

[135] Debora L. Silverman, Art Nouveau in Fin-De- Siecle France: Politics, Pshychology and Style (University of California Press, 1989): 63.

[136] Silverman: 63 & 65.

[137] Fraser Harrison, The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality (New York: Universe Books, 1977): 64.

permitted to initiate legal proceedings, sign contracts and vote in a limited number of elections.[138] Furthermore, in the 1890s, bourgeois women were given the opportunity to benefit from secondary and higher education financed by the state.[139] Certainly, the most significant freedom realized by middle-class women was the legalization of birth control in 1878 and the dissemination of information about contraception throughout the country. By releasing women from the constant restrictions of pregnancy, birth control redefined women's traditional social role.[140] Since motherhood no longer had to dominate a woman's life, there was time for her to cultivate interests of her own, that could range from becoming an educated member of society to seeking a profession. It is important to note that this release from motherhood enabled women to find sexual pleasure in their husband's attentions and to recognize their own bodies as origins of pleasure, as discussed in the preceding chapter. In fact, this realization that a female sex drive was normal contributed to a popular understanding of the New Woman as a female in control of her own sexuality.

As noted above, the emergence of a femme fatale stereotype was directly related to certain male fears of the New Woman's aggression. To most of the late nineteenth century middle-class the femme fatale was understood as an unflattering portrait of the ambitious female rather than a positive expression of potential female vitality.[141] Men in particular perceived the social changes achieved by women, especially in the areas of education and social legislation, as a threat to male rule, and feared that women would replace patriarchy with

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[138] Women could vote for school boards etc. but did not get a national vote for parliamentary elections until 1918.

[139] Silverman: 65-66.

[140] Harrison: 67.

[141] Later in this chapter, I intend to explain how Bearsley critiqued this perspective when he transformed the femme fatale into a person well on her way to social and sexual independence.

"an equally restrictive reign."[142] Men feared the modern woman's assertiveness and her desire to function on equal emotional terms with men in sexual relations. According to Virginia Allen, this mutation of the New Woman into the femme fatale was a result of her perceived departure "from the conventional ladylike docility prescribed by polite society."[143] Fearing the destruction of their patriarchal culture, men created a wide range of femme fatale imagery. Indeed, the harshness of such femme fatale imagery was stimulated by the growth of feminism. For many fearful middle-class males the women depicted by artists such as Beardsley in England or Edvard Munch in Germany represented amorous females who indulged their own sexual desires without fear of conception and in the process drained men's vital fluid.[144] It should be noted, however, that Beardsley may not have intended Salomé to represent a femme fatale who cruelly and maliciously tortured men. Instead, this may have been simply how his images were perceived by a fearful and conservative group of male critics. In my opinion, the artist's intentions should not necessarily be seen as mirroring his viewers' responses. One could argue that Beardsley's critical use of femme fatale imagery was designed to question society's paranoia about independent women, much in the way that his appropriation of black-and-white advertising schemes criticized the press as discussed in the previous chapter. In both cases he seems to have turned the original meanings of the images and styles upside down.

Returning to Beardsley's femme fatale imagery, we find that because

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[142] Zatlin (1990): 13.

[143] Virginia M. Allen, The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon (New York: Whitston, 1983): 190.

[144] See, for example, Munch's Vampire (1893-1894), which powerfully expressed what many males feared about female sexual-awareness (Figure 31). Of course, this image, like the Salomé designs, could also have been interpreted as a positive expression of female vitality. In this way, Munch's artworks presumably reflected the complexities and ambivalence of Germany's reception of the New Woman.

the women he was depicting behaved in a masculine way, they were sometimes given male, or androgynous, appearances. For example, in Beardsley's designs for Salomé her extreme thinness and indiscernible female sexual characteristics in The Peacock Skirt and The Toilette of Salomé II (Figures 13 and 19) convey a sense of freedom and personal independence, qualities which, although traditionally associated with men, were also being increasingly demanded by feminists of the period. As Bridget Elliott has noted: "slenderness ... in excess ... was a hallmark of unnatural, artificial New Women [whose] ... demands for education, social equality, meaningful employment, and freedom from the tyranny of continuous childbirth were constantly dismissed as unnatural by her opponents."[145]

As mentioned earlier, the New Woman, rarely took the guise of the femme fatale in the popular images and short stories of periodicals such as the English Illustrated Magazine and To-Day. Instead, the popular press apparently chose to represent the modern woman of the 1890s in a less controversial fashion that would better suit conventional middle-class readers. While token acknowledgment was made of women's aspirations to sexual liberation, such aspirations were usually represented as minor modifications in an overwhelmingly traditional structure. For instance, the 'love affair' seemed to be the most popular medium through which the liberation of traditional sexual roles was achieved, as will be studied in two examples below. First, however, in order to fully appreciate the relationship between the modern woman and popular fiction, especially the form of the illustrated short story, we need to explore the emergence of this genre.

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[145] Bridget Elliott, "New and Not so 'New Women' on the London Stage: Aubrey Beardsley's Yellow Book images of Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Réjane," Victorian Studies (1987): 50.

The short story was considered the ideal medium for the new sorts of subjects favoured by late nineteenth century realist writers because the immediacy of the short story format allowed them to address events and debates in contemporary life. Moreover, their compactness added an intensity to the ordinary experiences of everyday life by accelerating its pace toward an emotional climax and, often, a surprise ending. Ideally suited to the New Realism, the short story drew controversial issues to the attention of the reading public. Some recurring topics included the New Woman, sexual relationships, unhappy marriages, adultery and death.[146] In other words, the short story was a vehicle for the presentation of previously tabooed subject matter. Indeed, it seemed as if the portrayal of real human misery (as opposed to life's pleasures) was preferred by writers who tackled such themes as death in a stark, sober and pessimistic fashion which, according to some, excluded "even brief moments of happiness" and disregarded all personal dignity.[147] Concerning the theme of the New Woman, nineties' writers often depicted the power struggle between the sexes in terms of a love affair which ended with the rejection of the male by the female partner. John Lane, for example, published stories of this kind in anthologies such as George Egerton's Keynotes (1893), and in periodicals such as the Yellow Book (1894-97). (An extreme expression of this formula was Wilde's play, Salomé, wherein the heroine requested Herod to have St. John the Baptist beheaded after the Saint had refused her sexual advances.) Indeed, the hero in short stories often met with an end that was predetermined by the heroine ranging from his rejection as a lover to his tragic death, as in Beardsley's Dancer's Reward (Figure 20). Such rejection usually

[146] Wendell V. Harris, British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 114-115.

[147] Harris, 116, 117-118. For an example, see "How it Feels to Die," To-Day (February 10, 1894): 14.

symbolized female self-affirmation. This type of ending must have fuelled certain men's terror at the prospect of women's new socio-sexual roles since, as an act of symbolic castration, it appeared to signal the end of male dominance.

In order to better understand how the New Woman was represented in the popular journalism of Beardsley's day, I will examine examples taken from two major publications from this time: "Cynthia's Love Affairs," from the English Illustrated Magazine (February, 1894) and "A Woman's Toss-Up," from To-Day (Saturday, February 10, 1894).[148] Following a discussion of these short stories I will examine two illustrations of the nineties woman: Dudley Hardy's "Dis Donc !" in To-Day and an advertisement for Beecham's Pills (Figures 32 and 33). This section will conclude with a detailed discussion of the New Woman as conceived by Aubrey Beardsley in Salomé. In particular I will address his manner of representation and his ostensibly equivocal intentions. Indeed, one of my primary concerns is to explore the motives underlying both literary and artistic representations of the New Woman. Whose purposes did these portrayals serve and how did they differ in relation to each other ?

"The Experiment" was the third instalment of Barry Pain's serial, "Cynthia's Love Affairs."[149] It is interesting to note that even before the story began the title already described a social misfit: Cynthia was a middle-class woman who instead of dedicating herself to marriage was involved in *many* love affairs, an occupation usually reserved for men who were free to circulate uncommitted in society without harm to their reputations. As a New Woman, Cynthia exhibited her freedom by attending parties unchaperoned after her

[148] These particular issues were chosen with the February 9, 1894 publication date of Salomé in mind in order to provide a consistent time frame for the study of predominant ideas and images surrounding the characterization of the New Woman in the press.

[149] Barry Pain, "Cynthia's Love Affairs," English Illustrated Magazine (London, February 1894): 459-463.

close friends, Alice and Jimmy, had gone "away to live in the country ... preventing them from exercising a friendly and unnecessary supervision over [Cynthia's] particular affairs."[150] When next she attended a party, Cynthia found herself attracted to Hubert Pedley who, "although he was possessed of considerable independent means ... [never] had any inclination to spend a portion of his income on the maintenance of a wife."[151] She described him as "rather matter-of-fact than romantic" and was attracted to Hubert "merely because [she] was immensely interested in him."[152] It was implied that Cynthia's attitude towards Hubert was a decidedly modern one where an intellectual bond outweighed a superficial romantic attachment. She valued both his intelligence as well as his respect for her. Moreover, she explained, he was not interesting all at once like so many (types she disliked) intimating that she was quite experienced with men of all kinds. Indeed, Pain took care to represent Cynthia as a woman affecting traditionally male thoughts and behaviours so that she was "instantly seen as the independent woman, since no 'true' woman in the nineteenth century aspired to escape ... [social or economic] dependence on [men]."[153] Furthermore, Cynthia's 'telling' of the story in the first person was noteworthy because it denied the author's traditional role of narrator, thus avoiding standard descriptions of the heroine as "remarkably pretty"[154] or "nun-like"[155] which would detract from her intelligence and independence by positioning her as an object to be admired and discussed. Secondly, the ability

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[150] Pain: 459.

[151] Ibid.

[152] Pain: 459 & 462.

[153] Allen: 193.

[154] Jane Austen, Mansfield Park (1814) (New York & London: Penguin Classics, 1985): 55, from a description of Isabella Crawford.

[155] George Eliot, Middlemarch (1871-1872) (New York & London: Penguin Books, 1984): 6, from a description of Dorothea Casaubon.

to speak to the reader on her own behalf empowered Cynthia and put her in charge of her own circumstances and choices. In fact, at no point in her narration did Cynthia regret her independent status or refer to her less 'womanly' conduct in a negative fashion. Indeed, to some degree she assumed the male role with ease when she described Hubert Pedley's person by detailing his age, physiognomy, interests and even his "hopeless outlook," and also when she initiated a personal conversation with Mr. Pedley upon their second meeting and caught "his right hand in [her's] and could have kissed it" and met "his eyes ... across a room full of people."[156] The final action, in particular, characterized the modern woman "who was sexual and unashamed and who returns an even gaze."[157]

After some weeks Hubert told Cynthia that his passion was to "collect men and women" for a scientific assemblage dividing "the whole human race into three hundred genera, according to their important characteristics," and these genus, in some cases, into a number of sub-genera. This collection, he told her, was kept in "a cabinet ... containing three hundred drawers."[158] Hubert, anxious to obtain Cynthia's identity as a specimen of this collection, requested a photograph which would be categorized and filed away in the appropriate drawer. If the photographic image was understood to represent the New Woman, then this act of classification by the leading male suggested not only an attempt to deny her self-hood, it also redefined the modern woman as a temporal phenomenon of interest only for her originality. Further on, in fact, Hubert proclaimed jokingly that he wanted more than just the photograph, he wanted to keep Cynthia herself in "captivity," ostensibly to keep her from

[156] Pain: 459,461 (when he rescued her from a blazing candle shade and singed his hand) & 462.

[157] Zatlin (1990): 34.

[158] Ibid.

indulging her newly won freedoms and legal rights. Unlike the standard heroine who eagerly awaited a marriage proposal and despite her curiosity and romantic interest in Hubert, Cynthia was not immediately won over by the enigmatic proposition and sought him out after some time had passed for an explanation of his terminology. Here is their exchange:

> "I have frequently," he said, "in talking to you, commented on prevalent customs."
>
> "Yes," I answered; "you have given me an impression that things in general are all wrong, that they can't be put right, and that it doesn't matter, but is on the contrary rather funny."
>
> "Well," he said, "in this case I have a remedy to purpose. I think that the present method of getting married - which I propose to remedy - is distinctly disgraceful."
>
> "Why ?"
>
> " In the first place it is not gradual enough. It must be a shock for a woman to suddenly transfer herself from the dead chill of an ordinary social meeting to the - the intimacies of a betrothal. There should be a preliminary step, something which might be called the experiment... [159]

Of course the custom referred to by Hubert was the bourgeois institution of marriage which Cynthia agreed, at least in theory, did not conform to the ideals of female emancipation. Seeing that she was a modern woman Hubert goodheartedly proposed an arrangement outside the traditional boundaries of marriage which he called "the experiment." In reality, however, it appeared that Hubert, in the guise of being supportive, was in fact exploiting woman's newly won independent status in order to procure a mate for himself without incurring the financial loss or the inconvenience of a traditional wife. Moreover, his part in "the experiment" denied all responsibility for the ruin of Cynthia's reputation. Would she throw off the shackles of middle-classdom and indulge her most

[159] Pain: 463.

basic instincts ? Indeed, Hubert's approach called Cynthia's bluff because theoretically an arrangement other than an official engagement seemed sympathetic to the modern woman's ideal of freedom from the constraints of a social bond which traditionally embraced the ideology of separate spheres, and thus denied her freedom to make her own choices. In order to achieve his own ends, Hubert Pedley, then, takes advantage of a feminist agenda which demands the emancipation of women from traditional middle-class roles. In the end, Cynthia accepted his daring proposal but almost at once realized it was a mistake despite the logic of "the experiment:"

> The experiment did not last for long. I knew almost at once that I had made a mistake, but I waited on with a wild hope that the thing might come right. I used all my logic on the thing that logic never alters. Once I happened to catch his eye looking at me across a room full of people. I got up and went out. I could not stand it.[160]

What immediate purpose did this popular portrayal of the New Woman serve ? The male authorship of "Cynthia's Love Affairs," suggests the story was intended to function as 'a moral lesson given by a knowing male.' Pain's message was so simple even *women could understand its significance* : if this was what modern women wanted they were suffering delusions since a movement to emancipate females obviously could not succeed in a middle-class society founded upon the traditional bonds of marriage. In other words, abandon the struggle and go home to your family, suggested the author of "Cynthia's Love Affairs." The intent of characterizing Cynthia as an independent woman in a romantic dilemma was to convince the female reader that the possibility of freely given love between equals was undermined by women's

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[160] Ibid.

ultimate emotional and economic dependence upon men. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the mode of representing the New Woman in the popular press was less radical and less related to actual feminist issues than the 'highbrow' conceptions by Beardsley, for example,[161] and that her struggles for independence occurred within the boundaries of a society love affair rather than the public sphere of higher education and the professions. We can conclude, therefore, that this 'popular' conception of the New Woman was solely intended to thwart middle-class women's dreams of liberation.

This popular conception of the New Woman also appeared in the February issue of To-Day in a story titled "A Woman's Toss-Up," by A. Adams Martin, in which Carrie Vanderspiel was "on the horns of a dilemma."[162] Typical of late nineteenth century short stories, this love affair placed the fates of two men in the hands of a modern woman. In this case Carrie had to decide which suitor she preferred on the basis of personal letters expressing each man's affection and merit. To complicate the choice further, the letters called up "a vision of their two faces [which were] ... just too lovely for anything."[163] This gender reversal in which Carrie adopted typically male behaviour suggested she was judging her lovers according to the same superficial expectations demanded by men of woman and, in this way, the author seemed to call the middle-class reader's attention to the foolishness of such inventories in the selection of a mate. The author clarified his argument with Carrie's ridiculous description of Charles as "a big-blonde angel ... with the cunningest little moustache ... or one of those German opera heroes - Lohengrin ... [and] as true

[161] This conceptionbeing the alluring and malignant femme fatale, as represented by Aubrey Beardsley in Salomé, whose justification, both traditional and revolutionary, will be discussed later in this chaper.

[162] A. Adams Martin, " A Woman's Toss-Up," To-Day (London, February 10, 1894): 7.

[163] Ibid.

as a big Newfoundland dog ... [and Bob as] clever ... [with] perfectly splendid eyes ... [although Bob wasn't] half so handsome as Charles, nor so rich - and I don't like his coats."[164] In this manner the main female character degraded and diminished Charles' and Bob's worth as human beings by defining their importance in ludicrous terms. In this sense, one could argue that a woman like Carrie was conceived by Adams Martin to illustrate the New Woman's evil agenda of dehumanizing and destroying the middle-class male ego. Linda Gertner Zatlin observes, that by challenging male rule the women's movement caused patriarchal men to fear the spectre of women creating an equally suppressive government.[165]

In the end, still undecided, Carrie spun a silver coin "heads Charles; tails Bob," and although Charles came out the winner Carrie recalling Bob's "way of looking at you which makes you feel too mean for anything" submitted to a socially acceptable female sensibility and decided to "just take - Bob !"[166] So, the author concluded, despite her recently acquired independence and legal rights the New Woman was unable to assume male responsibilities because her 'natural' female modesty interfered. Given the right to choose, women's inherent meekness denied their ability to make those decisions which were vital for preserving a healthy society. This notion was demonstrated in "A Woman's Toss-Up" where again we see the modern woman represented by a confused young lady caught in a dilemma. Like Cynthia, Carrie was forced to make a life altering decision, where Cynthia's choice proved faulty Carrie could not decide at all. The implications for the female reader were obvious: if Carrie could not

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Zatlin (1990): 13.

[166] Adams Marin: 7.

even resolve a romantic dilemma, what right had the nineties woman to make important political decisions ? From this we can conclude that such short stories served to undermine women's self-confidence and self-esteem, causing the reader to question the validity of feminism's demands.

These distorted representations of the modern woman in short stories were similar to those found in popular press illustrations and advertisements. One such illustration, "Dis Donc !" by Dudley Hardy, appeared in the February 10, 1894 issue of To-Day as the inside-cover drawing. The image frontally assaulted the reader's senses in terms of the radical turn of the woman's body and her outward gaze. Not only did she meet the viewer's eyes, she smiled knowingly and, turning, unashamedly offered her partly revealed breast. This particular image might have been read as a highly sexualized female who countered the traditional ideals of modesty and motherhood. Her immodesty did not consist of wearing a typical nineties style evening dress but was asserted by her brazen physical pose and gesture. According to Debora Silverman, in the 1890s the woman's portrait became a psychological document which depicted modern women as active, public, mobile and agitated.[167] Such images occurred in press advertising and periodical illustrations like "Dis Donc!" as well as Salomé's The Stomach Dance which depicted an extraordinarily sexually aware woman. Hardy publicly acknowledged women's sexuality in "Dis Donc!" by the upright posture and turn of the woman's body which spiralled upward from her ankles, the eagerness of her foreward lean and her even gaze. Indeed, Hardy's New Woman positively exuded confidence, and by presenting her body in the most flattering manner

[167] Silverman: 69.

she engaged in a form of libidinal dialogue which expressed both sexual self-control and an awareness of her body, released from pregnancy, as a source of pleasure. Gazing directly at the reader and gesturing to a space beside her on the settee she responded, "Dis Donc !"

However, despite Hardy's assertion of this woman's self-awareness, the connotation of the title which translates as "You Don't Say !" suggested that the woman assumed the age-old stereotypical female role of the coquette who solicits male company. Hence the image was fraught with ambivalence: while the woman was socially in control of the situation, she was economically dependent on attracting a man. Although Dudley Hardy's image of "Dis Donc!" did imply a new freedom of movement and expression for women, it unfortunately ignored other feminist achievements which gave women legal rights and access to higher education and the professions. By focusing on the woman's sexuality to the exclusion of other forms of female independence the viewer was encouraged to see the New Woman merely as a sexual creature. In this case it appears that certain men were willing to manipulate women's sexual desires to serve their own sexual fantasies, erotica and pornography. In an attempt to counteract women's new self-sufficiency in the 1880s and 1890s, Linda Zatlin notes that men initiated the conquest of women by means of "pornography [which] portrayed women as objects necessary only to satisfy male sexual needs."[168] As a way to ensure male superiority, then, an image like "Dis Donc !" could easily be seen as a sexually alert woman whose inviting gaze and sexually aggressive body language demanded a sexual response, suggesting that Hardy's New Woman also functioned as a socially acceptable form of pornography. Again, whether or not Hardy intended it, a perverse

[168] Zatlin (1990): 20 - 21.

interpretation of the New Woman of the nineties helped undermine women's self confidence by suggesting that those who stepped over traditional gender boundaries were perceived by society as outsiders, radicals and even prostitutes. To this extent the artist undermined the serious intentions of the New Woman by showing her as an aggressive coquette - perhaps deliberately playing with the slippage between the sexually assertive New Woman and the prostitute. In this respect, Hardy's "Dis Donc !" offered only a false illusion of liberation, much as Hubert Pedley offered Cynthia a supposedly emancipated "experiment." Indeed, such ambivalences and slippages also characterized a lot of Beardsley's work which suggests that he too had mixed feelings about the New Women as we shall see.

A more openly disparaging image of the New Woman appeared in various late nineteenth century advertisements such as one for Beecham's Pills (Figure 33). In this case, a woman was shown in a masculine pose, with one hand on her hip and both legs apart. Wearing men's clothes she gazed out confidently towards the viewer. In this instance, the woman's sexual allure was downplayed since the advertisers wanted to advance the popular notion that modern women literally wanted to become men just as feminists demanded the same freedoms as those enjoyed by middle-class men. According to Virginia Allen, the "nineteenth century conviction that personal independence and freedom were masculine," meant that if women behaved in a masculine fashion, they were given a masculine appearance.[169] This concept was taken up by Beecham's whose ludicrous interpretation of the liberated female ignored feminist demands for political rights, education, access to the job market and a woman's right to control her own sexuality. Although Beecham's intended it as

[169] Allen: 193.

a joke and, no doubt, certain Victorians found it highly entertaining, the humour of the advertisement revealed the inability or unwillingness of average middle-class viewers to comprehend the primary inequality of traditional gender roles and to recognize the need for a radical reordering of bourgeois society. Instead, such social reordering was made to seem absurd.

Having now studied several interpretations of the New Woman in the popular press we recognize that one of her functions was to undermine women's confidence in the feminist movement. In short, feminist ideals were presented as incompatible with the matrimonial basis of bourgeois society in "Cynthia's Love Affairs;" New Women were portrayed as silly and, therefore, incapable of making an informed, intelligent decision in "A Woman's Toss-Up;" the New Woman was transformed into an erotic object of the male gaze in "Dis Donc !" and finally, the liberated woman was depicted as an amusing eccentric dressed in male attire in the Beecham advertisement. In all of these instances, the popular press portrayed the New Woman and female emancipation as undesirable, unattractive and entirely inconceivable. However, this was by no means the only reaction to feminism in the 1890s. Indeed, before we can fully appreciate the complexity of this issue some other viewpoints should be studied. Here I will consider some alternative interpretations of the New Woman as a more or less positive force in the works of George Egerton and, to some degree, Aubrey Beardsley.

George Egerton's collection of short stories, entitled Keynotes, from 1893 provided a radical alternative to the submissive heroines of the Romance novel.[170] Published by Mathews and Lane the book was typical of the Bodley Head's production in that it "appealed to the current interest in beautiful books

[170] George Egerton, Keynotes (London: The Bodley Head,1893).

(it was illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley) and a taste for the bizarre and unusual."[171] Rather than disparaging her heroines or setting them up as ideals of virtue, Egerton celebrated the fervent reality of female desires by giving her female characters strength, decisiveness and sexual control. In the story "A Cross Line," for example, the author represented an independent woman who was a multifaceted individual with human strengths and weaknesses. Egerton recognized that although men saw women as chaste angels upon whom society's morals depended, this was an ideal fashioned along imaginary lines that no real woman could embody. Consequently, she explained, men have "overlooked the eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best woman."[172] With Keynotes Egerton set out to deconstruct the ideology of separate spheres when she reminded her readers that women were not fashioned in opposition to men and that the concept of a 'softer sex' was ludicrous. Instead she argued that men and women were created equal, sharing like needs and desires. Indeed, according to Egerton, the myth of the gentle wife and mother was a middle-class invention perpetuated by class conscious individuals in order to preserve the status quo from sweeping social reconstruction. The reality of female existence, Egerton pointed out, was that women too craved excitement, change, sun, love and motion.[173]

Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé expressed a similar belief in the inherent power and passion of women and for this reason one could argue that he chose the femme fatale as the ideal representative for the New Woman well on her way to social and sexual independence. However, as in the

[171] Nelson: 77.
[172] Egerton: 22.
[173] Egerton: 21.

case of Hardy, one could also argue Beardsley's tendency to show the modern woman as a femme fatale expressed his own ambivalence. In other words, he reclaimed and reworked the femme fatale in a way that was simultaneously traditional and radically innovative. Taking the monstrous female figure of patriarchal imagination, Beardsley turned the femme fatale into a modern, independent woman who controlled her own destiny. This concept was exemplified by Salomé and Herodias who appeared to be strong, vital and self-assured woman. In the case of Salomé it should be noted that the different context (fine-art versus popular publishing) affected the public's perception of the imagery. Whereas the working- classes probably read popular press images of the New Woman as unproblematically negative, the middle-classes were more likely exposed to both popular and 'highbrow' illustrations and, therefore, could probably engage with the complexities, contradictions and problems surrounding such imagery in the 1890s. Even though Beardsley's femme fatale imagery was not so very different from more negative popular stereotypes, both its fine-art context and the radical reputation of this artist made room for an alternative and more positive interpretation of the femme fatale as a modern, independent woman. This interpretation of Beardsley's femme fatale imagery was, most likely, acknowledged by an educated class who recognized that this artist belonged to a circle whose attitudes towards women were sometimes ambivalent. Moreover, given its 'highbrow' context, this more positive definition of the New Woman was quite dissimilar to her obviously negative representations in periodicals like Punch which generally catered to a different audience. In effect, I am suggesting that Beardsley's images contained additional subtle layers of meaning, which at least in part, stemmed from both

his own as well as the public's confusion over women's emancipation in the 1890s. And yet, because society still understood the imagery's original function it still might have appealed to anti-feminist readers as well. Like Egerton's heroines, Beardsley's Salomé could function as a positive recognition "of women's hidden aggressiveness ... unconscious desires and fears" while, unlike Egerton, he also appeared to interpret Salomé as an "archetype of terrible femininity" intent on overpowering men.[174] If the reader chose the latter reading of Beardsley's image he/she could infer that Salomé, the New Woman, not only demanded equality with men she apparently wanted to replace masculine rule with a matriarchy intent upon making men pay for their past violations of womankind. The Dancer's Reward (Figure 20), for example, could be read as a woman's violent revenge upon a man who refused to acknowledge her sexuality. In Beardsley's typically ambivalent fashion, then, Salomé was situated both for and against popular middle-class constructions of the New Woman in the 1880s and 1890s. To better understand some of the contradictions in Beardsley's Salomé designs, three illustrations will be discussed in terms of how they shed light on the artist's political/practical intent. This ambiguity in Salomé's interpretation indicated not only the confusion this highly political issue had created among the middle-classes, it was also instrumental in contributing to the success of the book. In effect, the publishers' desire to sell a revolutionary product and Beardsley's investment in his future as an illustrator depended upon the public's positive reception of Salomé. So despite the fact that Salomé made fun of the bougeoisies' fears, it also solicited their financial success.

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[174] Ewa Kuryluk, Salomé and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque: Origins, Iconorgraphy, Techniques (Northwestern University Press, 1987): 189,191 & 236.

We will begin our discussion of Beardsley's motives by considering his rendition of The Stomach Dance (Figure 1). It could be argued that in this image Beardsley departed from the negative implications of female perversion and stupidity which was suggested by the majority of popular New Woman stories and illustrations and instead provided a positive image of female sexual awareness. In part, his more positive response to the debates over the women's movement may have stemmed from the fact that he had grown up during the 1870s and 1880s when a greater consciousness of feminist issues was already emerging.[175] Moreover, perhaps because he was part of a decadent subculture, Beardsley might have sympathized with the New Woman's struggle for equality since both movements were popularly associated with radical social change and perceived as a threat to the middle-class status-quo. In this illustration Salomé might be read as ideally characterizing the sexually independent New Woman of the 1890s whose eyes meet those of the (male) reader with an even, confident gaze, and whose sexuality was displayed with honesty and pride. Moreover, the waves emitted from between her thighs and two arcs of blossoms hovering over her stomach suggested that an orgasmic experience was occurring before the reader's eyes. In addition to controlling her own sexuality, Salomé was positively revelling in her own libidinal potential. From an anti-feminist viewpoint, however, The Stomach Dance might have been regarded as a corrupt transformation of the ideal Victorian woman into a seductress who, because she defied bourgeois conventions, was labelled an outsider by patriarchal culture and looked upon with contempt and suspicion. Moreover, such traditional viewers would have deplored Beardsley's depiction of Salomé as an intensely sexual being

[175] Zatlin (1990): 11.

bordering on the nymphomaniacal because of his unmistakable references to erotica and pornography in the dwarf's exposed/aroused member, the phallic instrument directed towards Salomé's genital area and Salomé's forward thrusting pelvis. In terms of the ambiguous nature of The Stomach Dance, we might conclude that although Beardsley may have intended this femme fatale to function as a corrective to the sexism of the bourgeoisie, its power to be read both positively and negatively would have appealed to the greatest possible number of readers and, thus, ensured the success of Salomé while at the same time maintaining an aura of mystery surrounding the artist's intentions.

The ambiguous nature of The Stomach Dance also characterized many of Beardsley's other illustrations for Salomé such as Enter Herodias (Figure 6) and The Climax (Figure 4) wherein mother and daughter, respectively, overthrew the patriarchal order through acts of female domination which were in themselves extreme but necessary as the first steps toward female independence. In the first design, Beardsley situated Herodias in the upper central portion of the picture plane between two male subordinates, the taller of whom only reached her left shoulder. This "emphasis on her height," notes Bridget Elliott in reference to a later depiction of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, "may well have been associated with the popular iconography of the New Woman, portrayed as dwarfing the average man."[176] Furthermore, Beardsley made a point of having the figure of Oscar Wilde (in the lower right) introduce her to the viewer. This caricature of Salomé's author was recognized immediately by the Saturday Review critic who noticed "Mr. Oscar Wilde himself ... in the orchestra [hugging] the book of Salomé with one arm, and with the other [pointing] to the

[176] Elliott: 49.

stage, where an immense Herodias ... strolled along."[177] By showing Herodias larger than life, Beardsley was stressing the power and significance of women in a male dominated culture which had traditionally overlooked women's intelligence. Moreover, the self-control revealed in her upright stature, confident gaze and proudly displayed sexuality indicated that Herodias symbolized the modern woman. And yet, recalling the case of The Stomach Dance, Beardsley's interpretation of this femme fatale also might have appeared equally valid to anti-feminists who could have read it as a negative expression of female superiority. Such an interpretation might be suggested by Herodias' superior attitude as evidenced by her towering form which visually diminished the males' importance, the indifference of her firmly set features and lack of eye contact with the viewer. Moreover, her defiantly displayed breasts emphasize her powerful sexual pride which was further enhanced in comparison with the slightly built, modestly endowed, effeminate male to Herodias' left. If Herodias' sexual awareness was proclaimed in this illustration, male sexuality was humiliated if not tormented. The slim, young man holding a powderpuff and mask, for example, not only lacked physical strength, but his ability to become sexually aroused was also denied. Some critics have suggested that he was homosexual and, therefore, not sexually attracted to Herodias.[178] This opinion was further supported by Beardsley's involvement with a homoerotic, decadent subculture with whom he shared inside jokes such as the censorious fig-leaf in Enter Herodias. In any case, this absence of traditional male desire would have mortified the conservative, heterosexual male viewer. The "elderly monster, cretinous and hydrocephalus, [lifting] a mincing toe high in the air"[179] whose

[177] "Salomé," Saturday Review: 317.

[178] Hodnett: 235.

[179] "Salomé," Saturday Review: 317.

erect member roasted above an open flame must have appeared torturous to male readers. This punishment presumably downplayed the male libido in favour of Herodias' sexuality. The last male figure, that of Wilde, shown crouched beneath Herodias, not only introduced the Queen but in doing so exposed his hand to an open flame which must explain his anguished expression. Recognizing the ambiguous nature of Enter Herodias, then, the reader should understand how Beardsley's ambivalent motives reflected the complexity of the subject matter and the wide range of middle-class responses to the issue of female emancipation.

In the case of The Climax, Beardsley's ambivalent stance was, again, precarious. In terms of Beardsley's critical intent, one could suggest either that The Climax illustrated the most extreme characterization of the New Woman taking control of her existence or that it functioned as an ominous vision of patriarchal destruction. Developing the former argument, one could read St. John as representing the church whose rules governing the morality of women contributed to their oppression and suppression.[180] Significantly he was beheaded by Salomé, a modern woman in pursuit of freedom and equality. From this pro-feminist viewpoint, Salomé's act of murder was understood as a recovery of women's lives from male rule. In my opinion, the elevation of Salomé's body from darkness to lightness, Salomé's firm grasp of St. John's head and her keen-eyed stare symbolically portray a sense of liberation in The Climax. The progress to enlightenment seems to be suggested by the visual contrasts of white and black, Salomé's open eyes and St. John's death mask,

[180] Given that St. John was something of an outsider in the early Christian church, his relevance as a church metaphor can be questioned. However, my reading of St. John as the church arose simply from his connection with the Christian religion. Neither the life of St. John nor his particular beliefs influenced my interpretation.

as well as the living lily beneath Salomé and the hanging stem beneath St. John. Such details might have been understood to represent Salomé's victorious liberation from patriarchal structures such as the church. However, despite its glorification of female emancipation this drawing could also be seen as upholding the arguments of those who resisted feminist demands. The theme of the illustration placed the male saint's destiny in the hands of Salomé who could be seen as a more evil manifestation of women like Carrie Vanderspiel whose decision was relatively harmless in comparison to the horrible death of St. John at Salomé's request.[181] According to Fraser Harrison, the death of a male was often paired with female self-assertion in literature and art of the nineties, and this symbolic death, in fact, "represented castration, impotence, etiolation, or plain spinelessness .... Any state to which men might be brought via women fighting sexual hierarchy."[182] From an anti-feminist viewpoint, St. John's decapitation in The Climax could support the notion that female liberation was a destructive force. Certainly Salomé's countenance suggested an evil glare of vengeance and her antenna-like tresses insinuated Salomé's desire to devour St. John. From this perspective the viewer's opinion that feminists were dangerous was upheld by Beardsley's supposed characterization of Salomé as a sinful woman.

It is interesting to note how easily these images lent themselves to competing interpretations. As already suggested, one explanation for the ambivalence of Beardsley's images might stress his duplicitous desire to support those who sought social change without alienating those members of

[181] Another example of this theme was found in Edward Burne-Jones' The Depths of the Sea (1887) which illustrated death by drowning, another common fate for male victims of femmes fatales (Figure 34).

[182] Harrison: 130 & 132.

the middle-class who still clung to tradition, thereby ensuring the success of Salomé. However, other less cynical explanations might also account for such ambivalent imagery. For instance, the inherent ambiguity of meaning demonstrated in The Climax revealed a profound misunderstanding between the supporters of patriarchal traditionalism and the advocates of female emancipation: the former fearing a complete loss of power and an act of castration, and the latter fighting for equality and opportunity. From a pro-feminist viewpoint Beardsley's Salomé designs were, presumably, intended to point out the problems of sexual inequality to a resisting middle-class and emphasize that women meant society no harm. In fact, according to a feminist agenda, women of the nineteenth century wanted to enjoy the same freedoms, choices and opportunities that men possessed. Accordingly, Beardsley appeared to depict women's triumphant realization of these freedoms by using reworked femme fatale imagery which already possessed extraordinary spirit and strength, (albeit of a perverse kind). Counter to its original purpose, then, the femme fatale was, at least partly, recognized by the artist as the ideal expression of the intensely independent, modern woman. And yet, in my opinion, the artist reworked the image in a way that was also inherently conservative. The women in The Black Cape (Figure 3), Enter Herodias (Figure 6) and The Toilette of Salomé II (Figure 19), for example, appear more interested in cultivating a fashionable appearance than female emancipation. Moreover, designs like The Dancer's Reward (Figure 20) and The Climax (Figure 4) seem to portray the liberated woman as a danger to a safe and secure middle-class. Without appearing to represent either a pro- or anti-feminist stance, Beardsley was able to illustrate the problems and complexities

of a revolution in his own time.

CHAPTER FIVE

SEXUALITY AND CENSORSHIP

In this chapter I will be dealing with sexuality which was one of the more controversial issues in late Victorian Britain. Certainly, there was a wide variety of social attitudes towards this subject within the middle-classes alone. Indeed, the range of sexual opinion becomes apparent when one compares the fairly liberal attitudes of Aubrey Beardsley with the more conservative stance of Mrs. Grundy, Britain's imaginary spokesperson and enforcer of social purity. If one considers Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé as a criticism of the social purity movement's cult of chastity one could argue that the artist represented a world of highly subversive sexualities. In effect, the creation of such powerfully rendered, violent and sexually repelling images could be understood as means the artist employed for criticizing the prevailing regulation of sexuality and sexism in late Victorian England. Such is the argument of this chapter. To fully appreciate Beardsley's response to this situation, however, one should first examine the social purity movement's agenda and consider why the formation of such societies attracted this artist's scathing criticism.

In the 1880s, purity leagues became worried about transformations within mainstream Victorian society such as women gaining the rights to vote in some elections and retain property after marriage. Such changes resulted in the social purity movement mounting high pressure campaigns to protest against certain sexual expressions (i.e. masturbation and the promiscuous woman) and some impassioned literature (i.e. Zola's Nana and La Terre). This powerful reaction by social purity emerged in the midst of radical social

changes, like those which released middle-class women from the restrictive ideology of separate spheres, and when writers such as Emile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, Oscar Wilde and George Moore were increasingly publishing work which explicitly dealt with sexual issues.[183] In fact, according to Eric Trudgill, between 1870 and 1900 "sexual liberalism was stronger ... than at any time in the century, ... [and this] indulgent attitude to immorality was more than ever a sign of decreasing moral seriousness."[184] Although from a liberal vantage point, the new literature of Flaubert, for example, might be seen as an indication of the healthy tolerance of sexual expression, "the widespread availability of [other] objectionable and obscene materials" was considered dangerous by organizations like the National Vigilance Association on the grounds that visual and literary 'pornography' threatened the continuing existence of a middle-class society.[185] Moreover, following the Education acts in the 1870s, an increase in proletarian literacy seemed to demand legal censorship "to protect the morals of the people from deleterious literature."[186] By the mid-1880s it appeared to the supporters of social purity that, indeed, society was being flooded by erotic art and literature which, in their minds, included serious artists and writers like Beardsley, Zola and Flaubert. To counteract the rise of increasingly liberal sexual attitudes, in 1888 "the statutes of obscenity and pornography" were strengthened with the

[183] In 1885, Henry Vizetelly published cheap translations from the French of Zola's Nana, La Terre, Pot Pouille, La Curée, L'Assommoir, Germinal and Thérèse Raquin. Zola proved so popular that Vizetelly published works by Maupassant and Flaubert in 1888. Some critics, however, like Samuel Smith, the Liverpool MP and the NVA's cheif spokesman on obscenity, told the Commons in May 1888 that Zola's "novels were only fit for swine." Similarly, although British author George Moore's A Modern Lover was commended by some critics in 1883, it was banned from Mudie's Select Library.

[184] Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes (London: Heinemann, 1976): 202.

[185] Bristow : 200.

[186] Trudgill: 239.

result that libel charges were brought against serious writers like Zola and Baudelaire.[187] Furthermore, Henry Vizetelly, a publisher, was persecuted for publishing works by Bourget, de Maupassant, and Flaubert.[188] By these means, the National Vigilance Association attempted to stamp out those forms of art and literature they identified as indecent and erotic. Unfortunately these prosecutions were also directed against the non-pornographic works of New Realist writers such as Emile Zola who was a popular target. As a result various progressive literary circles experienced a mounting climate of fear. One could argue that Beardsley's celebration of this literature represented a positive step towards sexual liberalization. His Toilette of Salomé II proudly displayed various New Realist works on the shelf of Salomé's dressing table. This scandalous row of books which included Zola's Nana, Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal a volume by the Marquis de Sade, Abbé Prévost's Manon Lescaut and Apuleius' The Golden Ass was, at that time, considered by many as pornographic. Hence one could read this image as one of Beardsley's gestures of defiance against the ludicrous 1888 obscenity law.

Another form of action taken by purity leagues was the promotion of the cult of chastity through a whole range of purity literature. As a rule, purity literature represented sexuality as negative and attempted to promote sexual control. One form of propaganda specifically aimed at males (females were not considered sexual beings) was the 1880s campaign against masturbation. This involved fostering the myth that, according to medical opinion, masturbation led to horrible mental deficiencies, blindness and other unwholesome disorders.[189] As mentioned in the previous chapter, masturbation was one of many taboo

[187] Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal (1861), for example, was considered especially offensive.

[188] Brisbin, 128-129. These consequences were recognized as medically valid until the 1920s.

sexual expressions addressed by Aubrey Beardsley in images such as the Toilette of Salomé I. This and other sexual issues will be taken up in detail in the following analysis of the ways in which Beardsley responded to purity propaganda in a number of specific images from Salomé.

Before we continue, however, it is important to note that although the social purity movement of the 1880s sought to suppress open expressions of sexuality and all forms of erotica, various purity discourses also gave bourgeois women a forum to talk about sexual inequality. According to Frank Mort, the social purity movement actually directed the women's movement in that it "empowered women to speak out about sex, challenging the authority of the experts and drawing attention to their gendered power relations."[190] Indeed, whenever political change was desired, speaking out was vital as silence provided an ideal opportunity for myths and false conceptions to ferment. In other words, feminist purity crusades challenged certain patriarchal definitions of sexuality which restricted women's rights and freedoms. Furthermore, the purity movement also gave women a space within male culture to educate the public through feminist discourse. Before feminism's role in the gender debate was publicly validated, "the language of purity [had] opened a space for women to define their own images of female sexual identity."[191]

Was Beardsley addressing this feminist aspect of the purity movement in addition to the mythology of chastity ? The ambiguous nature of the illustrations is inconclusive. That is, while Beardsley appeared to support emancipation in the eyes of some feminists, he may not have supported feminist purity campaigns given their association with the social purity leagues. On the

[190] Frank Mort, Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830 (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987): 117.

[191] Mort: 116.

one hand, therefore, the set of Salomé drawings could be understood as a space in which the artist explored women's lives. If each drawing was interpreted as a stage in the development of a woman's self-knowledge, than the set could be seen embodying a transformation. (A detailed analysis of this cycle will occur at the conclusion of this chapter.) Chapter four has already offered several examples of how women's emancipation was depicted in the Salomé illustrations. Women's new freedom from unwanted pregnancy, for instance, was represented by the artist in The Toilette of Salomé I. In this way, then, some in the women's movement may have viewed Salomé as a forum for the presentation of feminist issues. It should be noted, however, that Beardsley's ambivalent position towards feminism, and especially his criticisms of social purity, was further complicated by certain decadent attitudes towards women. As a decadent artist, he encouraged both pornography and liberated sexual experiences for women. The former notion would seem to suggest a hostility towards women given that pornographic images objectified and dehumanized women while the notion of sexual liberation could be understood as supporting women's equality with men, a type of feminism staunchly defended by George Egerton in books like Keynotes. Consequently, Beardsley's position should be seen as deliberately ambivalent, shifting between antagonism and sympathy for women's rights.

It might be said that Salomé functioned, firstly, as a commentary on various purity organizations, like the NVA, the White Cross Society and other purity leagues which dispensed purity propaganda and fought for the 1888 obscenity law which suppressed open expressions of sexuality, and, secondly, as a symbol of a newly emerging and fledgling climate of sexual tolerance. In

fact, I am suggesting that Beardsley was attempting to show Salomé's readers the harm that resulted from the publication of false purity propaganda. Possibly this was Salomé's ultimate goal. Moreover, his daring commentaries in Salomé on the popular (female) image in the press and its effect upon middle-class women created a space for the critique of other tabooed sexual beliefs. Just as female sexual potential was hidden or harshly criticized in the popular press (i.e. Cynthia's Love Affairs), other controversial issues such as celibacy, birth control, abortion, homosexuality and masturbation were prudently concealed from public view. As the purity crusades became more ambitious in the 1890s, Beardsley's critique of sexual ignorance became just as vehement. To demonstrate the severity of the artist's reaction, I will now examine how specific images from Wilde's play related to certain highly censored sexual issues.

As previously discussed in chapter four, Beardsley's Stomach Dance represented Salomé as a modern woman intensely aware of her sexuality and released from traditional gender expectations. Thus Salomé contradicted the notion that females were desexualized "gods" of chastity.[192] Indeed, it was Beardsley's almost demonic response to this "moral overestimation of women in nineteenth century culture" that necessarily made the women in his illustrations seem to be the "enforcers of violent, primitive ... nature," as in the case of Salomé's licentious passion for St. John the Baptist.[193] To appreciate this artist's reaction, the reader should understand that the concept of chastity was a virtue highly stressed by purity groups, particularly those associated with the Catholic church. In order to control sexuality, social purity leagues attempted to promote

[192] Bristow: 129, Egerton: 23.

[193] Camille Paglia, Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (Yale University Press, 1990): 501.

chastity as a socially desirable virtue for (men and) women intent upon forming healthy unions. According to Germaine Greer, "virgins could expect to be placed higher in heaven and ... [consequently] protection of bodily purity in some individuals became such an obsession that they refused to allow doctors to touch their bodies when their lives depended on it."[194] In another illustration, Beardsley presented a further regression from the romantic idea of pure love in the appearance of an aborted fetus on Salomé's dressing table in The Toilette of Salomé I. Most likely intended to stress Salomé's immorality and sexual activity, the fetus also signified the widespread use of contraception by the middle-classes in spite of "puritan militants who [persecuted] ... birth control propagandists."[195] Furthermore, women's struggle for equal rights in the late nineteenth century presumably included a woman's right to choose abortion as a form of birth control in opposition to those "opponents of reproductive freedom for women [only interested in] ... the souls of those trying to live."[196] The chastity theme was also addressed in the Title-page (Figure 5) for Wilde's Salomé which depicted a figure identified as androgynous although it was actually hermaphroditic. According to Mircea Eliade, late nineteenth century French and English decadents understood the androgyne "simply as a hermaphrodite in whom both sexes existed anatomically and physiologically."[197] So why did Aubrey Beardsley use this so-called androgynous figure of Salomé's title-page

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[194] Germaine Greer, Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility (New York: Harper & Row): 95.

[195] Trudgill: 203.

[196] Greer: 191.

[197] Mircea Eliade, Mephistopheles and the Androgyny: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol, translated by J. M. Cohen (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1965): 100.

?[198] No doubt its armless and legless state referred specifically to ancient statues of Hermes, called Herms, which were square pillars depicting male genitals with the head of Hermes on top of the form. These phallic statues were most likely intended to mark areas considered sacred or the boundaries of one's home and, hopefully, to bring luck and prosperity to that family. It was also believed that the Herms were symbols of fertility. Herme's union with Aphrodite produced Hermaphroditus, whose story is told by Ovid, "a single form that could not be called girl or boy and appeared at the same time neither one, but both."[199] It was not a traditional Herm, then, that appeared on Salomé's title-page. Rather, Beardsley used Hermaphroditus who, according to ancient beliefs, assured a successful beginning such as a sexual or cultural initiation to a new year, spring or harvest. Significantly, the ancients also believed that androgyne was a sign of creativity and "that one was handling an enormous reserve of sacred power."[200] In this case, therefore, the title-page figure was probably meant both to guarantee the success of Salomé and to emphasize the sacred talent of its illustrator. From another perspective, however, Beardsley's androgynous or hermaphroditic figure could be understood as a device that questioned male dominance through the presentation of alternative erotic possibilities. To fully appreciate this interpretation, the androgyne should be understood in its late nineteenth century context as it was conceived by decadents like Aubrey

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[198] A discussion of the androgyne in the context of Salomé could also address the male homosexual subculture, specifically transvestism. Although this thesis recognizes the feminine appearance and attitude of the men in Salomé as a means to enhance the New Woman's personal power and independence, these effeminate men could also be read as transvestites. The latter interpretation is bound up with a late nineteenth century controversy surrounding transvestism, a type of homosexuality which was not widely accepted in many homosexual circles. (From a lecture by Dr. Victor Chan, Professor of Art and Design at the University of Alberta, 1992)

[199] Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, Classical Mythology , second edition (New York and London: Longman, 1977): 182, 183 & 185.

[200] Eliade: 114.

Beardsley.

Artists and writers of the late nineteenth century viewed the androgyne as the ultimate decadent sexual personae because of its absolute opposition to nature.[201] Beardsley's use of this form of sexual subversion, then, might have been seen as a critique of Western assumptions about nature and society, specifically male dominance and female submissiveness. In other words, the depiction of an androgyne was most likely intended to question traditional sexual relations between men and women and to point out the limitations of a union patterned upon the patriarchal God-image. The androgyne in the late Victorian age was understood by intellectuals as a complete being, "a harmonious coexistence of masculinity and femininity within a single individual."[202] According to Singer, the androgyne came from the Void, an archetype of primordial unity, that is, oneness or wholeness, which underwent separation into two opposites only to rejoin prior to Creation.[203] The decadent idea of the androgyne which symbolized an ideal state of sprirtuality, however, was drawn from their interpretations of the hermaphoditic art of archaic cultures like Greece, the ancient Near East, Africa and China. An androgyne was understood as a "bisexual divinity," a being existing in "unity-totality," because to be perfect one must be, at the same time, the opposite, that is, "many other things at the same time, complete."[204] Wholeness, however, was not merely the result of a fusion between the sexes, but the copious erotic possibilities resulting from the presence of both sexes in one being. Following this line of

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[201] Paglia: 489.

[202] June Singer, Androgyny: Towards and New Theory of Sexuality (New York, Garden City: Anchor Press, 1976): viii. The term itself should be understood as male (andro) + female (gyne): 20.

[203] Singer: 20, 21.

[204] Eliade: 108 - 110.

reasoning, one might speculate that Beardsley utilized this image of sexual fusion on the Title-page to challenge the concept of male (sexual) dominance which was usually represented by a patriarchal God who was the basis of Judeo-Christian civilization. In erotic terms, Salomé's viewers might have seen the androgyne as a threat to some men's sexual security given its self-sufficient combination of female and male sexuality. In addition, this ideal sexual condition would presumably have raised other possibilities for women such as celibacy and masturbation.

Although masturbation went against the teachings of the church and other purity groups, it fulfilled a (woman's) sexual need and made one self-sufficient. At least to some extent, masturbation represented independence. If one accepts that masturbation was a natural sexual expression, why did church groups attach so much moralizing, frustration and guilt to it? Perhaps because a woman's self-sufficiency threatened the patriarchal family as keystone of the middle-class life. Three of Beardsley's illustrations for Salomé which could have been read as commentaries on masturbation and the 1880 campaigns against it are the Toilette of Salomé I (Figure 7), Salomé on Settle (Figure 16) and A Platonic Lament (Figure 17). As we saw in the first chapter, several art historians have interpreted the Toilette of Salomé as a flagrant display of the masturbatory act. Not one, but three individuals appear to be involved in their own sexual gratification ! In particular, the androgynous nature of the two young servants on the left side of the drawing must have been intended by Beardsley as a symbolic rejection of the conventional, male-oriented, sex act since the figures' androgynous nature renders a partner unnecessary. Salomé's self-sufficiency was an even more significant statement especially as it occurred

during the peak of the women's movement. It might be said that Beardsley was telling his female viewers that they did not require a man to direct their lives nor did they have to live in a state of servitude, but rather that independence was possible. If women engaged in masturbation, like the androgyne, they would not need a man to fulfil them sexually and emotionally. Of course the promotion of a celibate lifestyle among women would have exacerbated traditional patriarchal anxieties about the future of the race. Salomé on Settle depicted a similar theme, according to Stanley Weintraub, who stated in 1976 that this illustration was replaced with another because from the back Salomé's kimono might have been interpreted as open and the wand as a dildo.[205] Most likely, Salomé on Settle, like the Toilette, was meant as both a promotion of women's (sexual) independence and a critique of conventional gender attitudes. Likewise, A Platonic Lament has been understood by Linda Zatlin to depict a dwarf whose "right hand was hidden in the act of masturbation."[206] Observing the dwarf's countenance it might be suggested that this illustration criticized the notion that masturbation was a sin since he/she looks so content and free from guilt.

Beardsley most likely again crossed the boundaries of late Victorian taste and tolerance in illustrations such as Enter Herodias (Figure 6) which portrayed what appeared to be a homosexual holding a mask in his right hand, as if in the act of revealing his true sexual identity, and a powder puff in his left hand, possibly as a symbol of his effeminacy. The page's homosexual status was implied by the fact that he was not interested in Herodias as indicated by his unaroused genitals, which were discussed by Edward Hodnett.[207] With respect to A Platonic Lament (Figure 17) it

[205] Weintraub: 77.

[206] Zatlin (1990): 188.

[207] Hodnett: 235.

could be argued that this illustration was a depiction of homosexual love. Since this particular drawing illustrated the death of the young Syrian who was captain of Herod's army, the body being mourned by the male page is identified as male (despite its lack of specific male or female sexual characteristics).[208] Furthermore, although the lament was characterized as platonic, Oscar Wilde's text suggested that there was something more to the relationship between the young Syrian and Herodias' page.

> THE PAGE OF HERODIAS:
>
> He was my brother, and nearer to me than a brother. I gave him a little box full of perfumes, and a ring of agate that he wore always on his hand. In the evening we used to walk by the river, among the almond trees, and he would tell me of the things of his country. He spake ever very low. The sound of his voice was like the sound of the flute, of a flute player. Also he much loved to gaze at himself in the river. I used to reproach him for that.[209]

Beardsley's illustration seems to reinforce this loverlike bond in the passionate attitude of the page as he leans over his dead friend. However, knowing that a homosexual union would probably shock the Victorian reader and, more specifically, dissuade the conservative book buyer from purchasing Salomé, Beardsley might have played down Wilde's homosexual content by describing the connection as platonic in his title. On the other hand, the title might have ironically emphasized the erotic suggestion of the story by calling attention to it.

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[208] Oscar Wilde, Salomé, introduced by R. A. Walker (Great Britain: Curwen Press, Plaisow, 1957): 23. The art historian R. A. Walker understood A Platonic Lament as "out of place if itwas meant to represent Salomé with the body of John the Baptist." However, such a speculation makes one wonder how closely Walker read Wilde's text which clearly describes the lament of Herodias' page over his dead friend, the young Syrian. Perhaps in his desire to criticize the illustrations' lack of connection with the play, Walker deliberately overlooked Wilde's description of the event which appears nine pages after Beardsley's illustration. Actually, this is typical of Salomé as in the instance where Salomé does the dance of the seven veils fourteen pages after Beardsley's depiction of this erotic dance.

[209] Oscar Wilde, Salomé (New York: Three Sirens Press, 1894): 63.

That is, Beardsley might have highlighted, rather than concealed, this homosexual union. Like the absurdly enormous fig-leaf covering the genitals of Herodias' page in Enter Herodias (Figure 18) which only emphasized them even more, the title, A Platonic Lament, was also an inside joke which was presumably directed toward a decadent, homosexual subculture. Nevertheless, such homosexual content was also evident to purity leagues such as the National Vigilance Association and The White Cross society both of whom condemned homosexual practices as indecent and unallowable.[210]

We have just seen how the theme of homosexuality, which was suggested in Wilde's description of the relationship between Herodias' page and the young Syrian, was a relationship not unlike that between Wilde and his young protégé, Sir Alfred Douglas. Ironically, both ended in tragedy. In April of 1895, one year later, Oscar Wilde was arrested for homosexual activities and Aubrey Beardsley was dismissed from the Yellow Book by John Lane just as the fifth volume was about to appear. Indeed, Wilde's arrest and imprisonment illustrated the threat homosexuality posed for some members of the middle-classes and, consequently, the lengths the government went to stamp out possible homosexual activities. According to André Gide, who had known Wilde since 1891, "a stubborn rumour that grew with his success as a playwright ascribed extraordinary habits to Wilde ... [who] made no secret of it, and spoke of it without embarrassment - some said he spoke with bravado ... [as] his old friends were cautiously leaving him. Not yet did one quite disown him. But one no longer spoke of having known him."[211] The fact that Gide did not specifically label Wilde's habits as homosexual was most likely due to

[210] Bristow: 137.

[211] André Gide, Recollections of Oscar Wilde, translated by Percival Pollard (Boston and London: John W. Luce and Company, 1906): 41.

residual fears within society concerning Wilde's recent arrest. Charges had been brought against Oscar Wilde at the behest of Sir Alfred Douglas' father and Wilde had little alternative but to flee England for Algiers in January of 1895. Against his friends' advice, however, the playwright returned to London in April and to hard labour in prison. The arrest of Wilde came as a harsh reminder that homosexuality was considered a very serious crime in late Victorian Britain and, knowing this, one can appreciate the courageous daring of Aubrey Beardsley whose depictions of tabooed sexual expressions challenged the status quo.

In this last section I will raise a question which, to my knowledge, has not been addressed in Beardsley scholarship to date. Do the illustrations for Salomé resemble a process of female sexual awakening ? If we understand Adam and Eve, in The Woman in the Moon (Figure 8), to signify the beginning of a cycle and The Burial of Salomé (Figure 21) the end, than the prospect of a sequence is quite possible. That this cycle is defined as a woman's sexual experience is also possible considering the highly sexual nature of the drawings and the fact that Salomé was produced by an extremely socially aware and politically astute artist during the peak of the women's movement in England. This cycle can be further defined as an orgasmic experience since Adam and Eve, representing a naive traditionalism, are situated at Salomé's beginning and The Climax (Figure 4), which suggests heightened sexual awareness, is at the conclusion. If one chooses to read the Salomé series of illustrations as a process of female sexual enlightenment, several drawings stand out as signs of a progression. First of all, one should note that in The Woman In The Moon Eve stands slightly behind Adam who appears to shield

Eve with his body while keeping her in check with his left arm. Also, note the position of Adam's feet upon Eve's garment which ensures she cannot escape. Their physical attitudes suggest a traditional, male-dominated relationship in which the woman is denied freedom and independence. Moreover, the man's strong sense of his own sexuality, exemplified by the confident posture of his naked body, is juxtaposed with Eve's heavily draped and concealed sexuality. In fact, Eve's body below her shoulders appears quite incorporeal, and almost seems to deny an independent existence. Both the Border for the List of Pictures (Figure 14) and The Peacock Skirt (Figure 13) depict a woman, still heavily draped, with her back towards the viewer, although in these two illustrations the expression on her face betrays a certain ardour. In addition, observe that in the latter drawing Salomé has begun to turn towards the viewer in an almost violent fashion as indicated by the sharp swing of her cape. In The Black Cape (Figure 3) Beardsley depicts a woman in a fully frontal pose, even suggesting a body beneath the gown by means of an exposed navel. Of course her sexuality is still denied in favour of her representation as a woman of the 'fashion plate.'[212] If we accept Edward Hodnett's speculation that Salomé on Settle (Figure 16) was deleted in favour of The Black Cape because a prototype had already appeared in a volume of Bon-Mots[213] than we should reinstate Salomé on Settle in our cycle. When The Black Cape is deleted, Salomé on Settle falls logically after The Peacock Skirt when one considers Salomé's physical attitude. Salomé's back is still turned towards us and, although heavily draped, here her robe is obviously open. She appears to regard the wand with

[212] Walker (1957): 22. Concerning this illustration, R. A. Walker noted that Beardsley described 1890s fashion as absurd and uncomfortable with its "many flounced or caped cloaks, the very small waist due to outrageous corsetting and the long wide skirts and numerous petticoats."

[213] Hook and Foote (Dent): 53.

such keenness that, it has often been said, she may be about to engage in masturbation. The significance of this possibility points to her discovery of her own sexuality and, consequently, her possible independence. Salomé, in John and Salomé (Figure 15), is now almost completely frontal and, in addition to her navel, Beardsley illustrates Salomé's breasts. Also, notice that Salomé stands slightly in front of John who seems to shrink back as he silently listens to Salomé. The confidence of Herodias' stance in the next drawing, Enter Herodias (Figure 6), is supported by her fully, frontal posture centrally located in the picture plane at the top of a pyramid. She is larger than life, towering over the men surrounding her. Her sexual awareness, moreover, is pronounced by her proudly displayed breasts. Most likely, The Stomach Dance (Figure 1) signifies a woman's total self-knowledge and freedom of expression in the form of her sexual arousal. Meeting the viewer's eyes with a straight, even gaze, Salomé appears to be experiencing the bliss of orgasm marked by the waves emitted from between her thighs and the rosebuds dancing above her stomach. Salomé's nipples, in fact, have become rosebuds, her hair stands on end and the force of her abdomen thrusting forward characterizes a complete physical and emotional release. Indeed, for women, The Stomach Dance seems to symbolize the moment of personal, sexual knowledge and independence. It is an image of emancipation. Compared to this spirited drawing, The Toilette of Salomé I (Figure 7) is a vision of composure in which Salomé sits, presumably masturbating, in a state of self-assurance perhaps resulting from the discovery that women can have independent sexual identities which depart from middle-class models of the ideal woman. Furthermore, the fetus on the dressing table, mentioned in chapter four, points to women's new found freedom from constant

pregnancy. Also of note is Salomé's completely unadorned torso which previously had been partially concealed by a wide, black band between her breasts and navel in Enter Herodias and The Stomach Dance. In this way she is totally unrestricted, physically and sexually. The Dancer's Reward (Figure 20) and The Climax are dominated by phallic imagery characterized by the severed head of St. John the Baptist atop a wide, circular platter held up by a long, black arm in the first drawing and a winding, stream of water and blood in the second. In both illustrations Salomé is seen clutching at John' s head and hair almost violently, and her countenance could be described as vindictive. One could argue that here Salomé has won her battle against middle-class oppression by defeating the church whose doctrines directed some Victorian women's behaviours. Notice that Salomé completely dominates and controls the phallic forms as if to restrain male sexuality and patriarchal rule. (One should also note that these were, perhaps, anxiety-provoking images for men and as such perhaps revealed some of Beardsley's anxieties.) In addition, Salomé is, again, heavily draped but observe that compared to Eve's garment in Figure 8, the robes suggest an actual body beneath the fabric: Salomé has become a whole woman. Furthermore, I think that Salomé's clothed status signifies that woman are more than just sexual beings, they are also emotionally and intellectually capable of existing in society as men's equals. Earlier I mentioned that The Climax alludes to the height of orgasm and thus symbolizes a woman's successful attainment of sexual self-knowledge, the first step towards total independence. In The Burial of Salomé (Figure 21) Salomé's entirely nude body is about to be placed in a monstrous puff box, an event marking both the end of the cycle and the fact that women are corporeal like men, a reality

portrayed in this program whose cycle begins with a insubstantial and submissive figure of Eve in The Woman in the Moon. From this interpretation one could, indeed, conclude that the Beardsley woman has come a long way in Salomé. However, the reader of Salomé must not forget that Beardsley's attitude towards the New Woman appears quite ambivalent and, like Dudley Hardy's, shifted between sympathy, anxiety and something resembling malevolence.

CHAPTER SIX

BEARDSLEY'S PROGRAM: CONCLUSION

Throughout this study of Beardsley's Salomé illustrations, I have argued that in these drawings he confronted the misrepresentation, censorship, suppression, distortion and concealment of certain controversial issues by some members of Victorian society. In effect, Aubrey Beardsley appeared to question the continuing existence of outmoded beliefs, such as the middle-classes' definition of women as the 'softer sex,' as well as mystifications of sexuality and the female gender. However, we must take into account that Beardsley's attitude towards women was not clear and consequently, my study reflects the ambiguities of opinion which characterized this artist and the decadent circle. The issues, therefore, as they concern Salomé, are approached from different angles to provide as complete a view as possible of Beardsley's motivations, as well as those of Salomé's publishers, artists and critics. Given that, to my knowledge, scholarship on Beardsley from 1894 to the present has only dealt with the suppressed drawings and the hidden erotic details of the Salomé illustrations, I felt it was necessary to address other, less emphasized, factors. Looking at such issues as the role of the popular press, alternative meanings for the femme fatale figure, the emergence of the New Woman and the social purity movement's agenda, I have attempted to provide a more historically accurate context for the fuller interpretation of Beardsley's drawings.

The initial approach to Beardsley's illustrations required an extensive re-viewing of previous literature on the topic in the hope that by sifting through

the existing scholarship it would be possible to reconstruct the events surrounding the suppression and censorship of several images. The outcome, however, raised an intriguing new question relating to Salomé's historical context: of what importance were Beardsley's erotic images to the 1890s ? As I have argued, they allowed him to confront the existing censorship laws and to challenge the prevailing sexual myths and middle-class perceptions of women in the popular press and finally, to raise a number of taboo topics such as homosexuality, masturbation, abortion and celibacy. Indeed, his agenda was extraordinarily controversial but entirely appropriate to the complexity and confusion which marked Beardsley's day.

When I looked at other late Victorian artistic and literary portrayals of Salomé they confirmed her unmistakable role in the women's movement. Indeed, Salomé was, for many Victorians, the femme fatale - that is, a distorted characterization of the New Woman as evil and destructive. However, one could also argue that Salomé, as she was represented in works from Heine in 1847 to Laforgue in 1887, also confirmed that women could function independently. Moreover, Salomé's characterization promoted the idea that women were strong, intelligent, sexually aware and interested in directing their own lives.

Recognizing the femme fatale's duel nature helped me to understand that Beardsley also approached such issues in an ambivalent fashion. For example, his attitude towards the popular press was ambiguous. Why was this the case ? In my opinion, Beardsley was intrigued by the press' power and, specifically, by its ability to both censure and generate ideas which shaped a mass culture. Addressing this mass culture, he challenged the advertising

poster by providing ostensibly harsh criticisms of its 'popular' messages and its pretensions to a high art status while at the same time using its familiar black-and-white format to promote himself and his illustrations. In terms of criticizing the media, I looked at how the Salomé illustrations were used to confront popular conceptions of fashion, the New Women and sexual myths. I also noted that he confronted issues the press carefully censured, like homosexuality. For example, Salomé's resemblance to a fashion magazine called attention to the objectification of women in the press, an act which relegated women to a subservient and ornamental capacity. Such stereotypes appeared in Salomé, but Beardsley gave them a new twist which rendered their meanings ambiguous. Consequently, The Stomach Dance (Figure 1) was not merely a depiction of a exotic, young woman dancing, it was also a blatant promotion of women's sexual independence.

Given the ambivalence of his illustrations, it seemed important to consider how Beardsley went about assuring their success without sacrificing their political function. By addressing both positive and negative reactions to popular constructions of the modern woman, Beardsley simultaneously appeared to both support and critique the cause of female emancipation. Following this argument, I looked at some of the strategies Beardsley and other artists and writers employed to cope with the issues the New Woman raised. I pointed out how those most opposed to female emancipation generally represented the New Woman as a femme fatale figure who was intent upon the destruction of middle-class patriarchy. Slightly more moderate (albeit still highly critical) were short story writers who depicted a modern woman whose liberal aspirations were minor and usually played out in love affairs which ended with

the rejection of the male through some act of female self-affirmation. In these cases, the women were usually portrayed as one-dimensional and shallow, which must have denied the self-confidence of female readers from the period. Dudley Hardy's or Beardsley's images of women could also be understood at best as mere coquettes, or at worst as a form of 'soft' pornography since in such cases emancipated women were classed with deviant radicals and prostitutes. Popular imagery also suggested that New Women were eccentrics who wanted to become men. On the other hand, positive conceptions of the independent woman by female writers such as George Egerton deconstructed the myth that women were goddesses. Instead, Egerton portrayed women as intelligent human beings. In this respect, Beardsley's conceptions of the modern women could also be seen as positive, as in the case of The Stomach Dance, where Salomé ideally characterized the sexually independent New Woman of the 1890s. I have suggested that this ambiguity of interpretation was motivated by the artist's desire for success and recognition. Most likely, Beardsley set out to appeal to both conservative and radical social factions by depicting Salomé as both a patriarchal threat and as a sexually independent woman. (Of course, Beardsley's and the decadents' ambiguous personal feelings towards women also contributed to the confusion surrounding Salomé's interpretation.)

Concerning the issue of sexuality and censorship, Beardsley used highly charged sexual imagery to criticize the purity movement whose agenda included stamping out socially progressive literature, promoting the cult of chastity and perpetuating sexual myths. I have also noted that the social purity movement provided women with a forum to talk about inequality. The question of whether Beardsley would have supported such a forum in spite of its agenda

or whether he was more interested in fighting for sexual tolerance by exposing the falsity of purity propaganda needs to be posed. While such a problem deserves more investigation than I can offer here, it is interesting to note that Beardsley introduced previously tabooed subject matter in his Salomé illustrations. In Beardsley's drawings people are shown openly masturbating, a fetus lies on a dressing table, a woman appears to be experiencing an orgasm and various phallic symbols abound. Read as a narrative cycle, the illustrations might describe a woman's sexual self-discovery. Of course, the precariousness of such an interpretation must be asserted given Beardsley's often ambivalent treatment of New Woman themes. Throughout this study, I have attempted to interpret Beardsley's (female) sexual imagery within the context of the 1890s by seeing it as a means of confronting the changes in sexual relations taking place in the late Victorian period.

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FIGURE 1.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Stomach Dance, 1894.

Pencil & ink, 8 3/4 X 6 7/8 inches.

Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Fogg Art Museum,

Harvard University, Massachusetts.

FIGURE 2.

Aubrey Beardsley, J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, 1893.

Pen & ink and green watercolour wash, 10 15/16 X 5 13/16 inches.

Published in the Studio 1 (April 1893): 19.

Princeton University Library, Gallatin Beardsley Collection.

FIGURE 3.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Black Cape, 1894.

8 13/16 X 6 1/4 inches.

Princeton University Library, Gallatin Beardsley Collection.

FIGURE 4.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Climax, 1894.

Line block.

Property of Brian Reade, London.

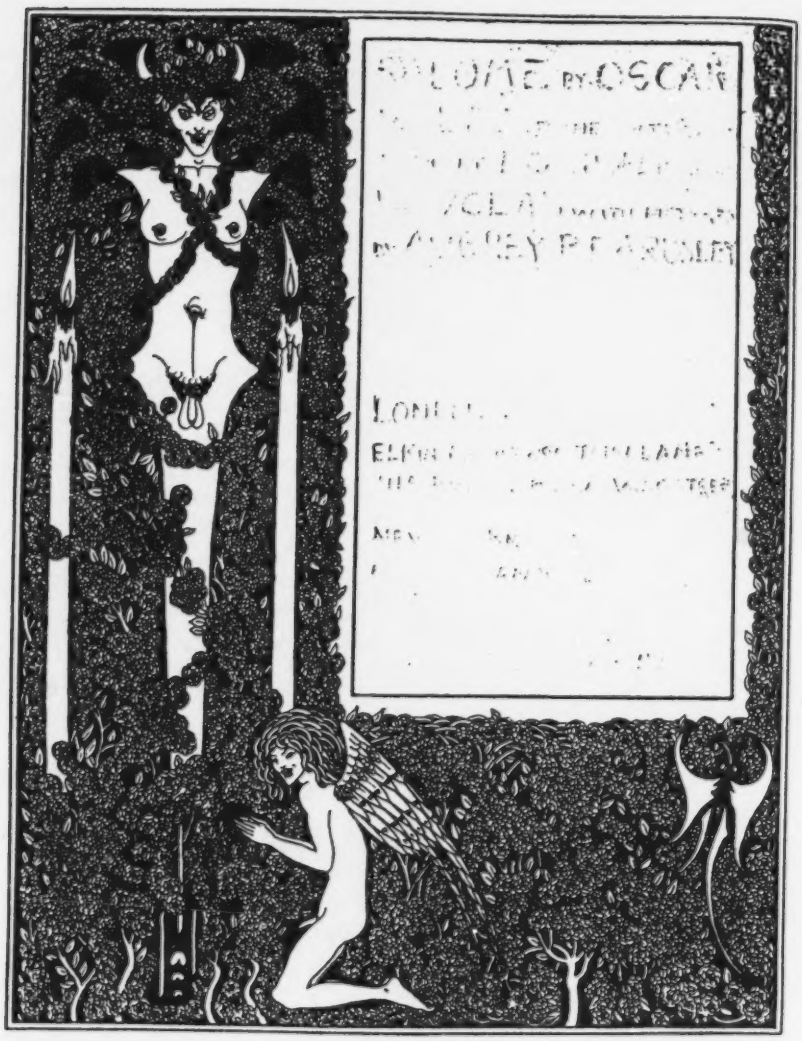

FIGURE 5.

Aubrey Beardsley, Title-page (unexpurgated), 1894.

8 3/4 X 6 1/2 inches.

Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Fogg Art Museum,

Harvard University, Massachusetts.

FIGURE 6.

Aubrey Beardsley, Enter Herodias (unexpurgated), 1894.

Line block, 7 X 5 1/16 inches.

Princeton University Library, Gallatin Beardsley Collection.

FIGURE 7.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Toilette of Salomé I, 1894.

Line block.

FIGURE 8.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Woman in the Moon (unexpurgated), 1894.

Pencil and ink, 8 3/4 X 6 1/8 inches.

Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Fogg Art Museum,

Harvard University, Massachusetts.

FIGURE 9.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Woman in the Moon (expurgated), 1894.

FIGURE 10.

Aubrey Beardsley, Title-page (expurgated), 1894.

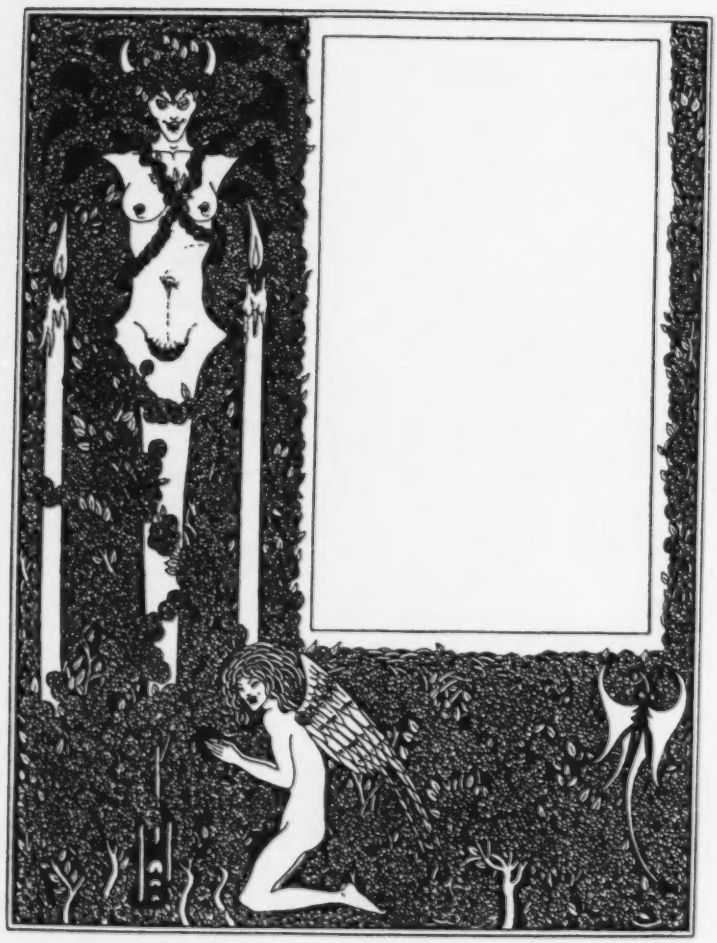

FIGURE 11.

Aubrey Beardsley, Title-page (partially expurgated), 1894.

Property of John Lane.

FIGURE 12.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Eyes of Herod, 1894.

Pencil and ink, 8 3/4 X 6 7/8 inches.

Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Fogg Art Museum,

Harvard University, Massachusetts.

FIGURE 13.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Peacock Skirt, 1894.

8 7/8 X 6 1/4 inches.

Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Fogg Art Museum,

Harvard University, Massachusetts.

FIGURE 14.

Aubrey Beardsley, Border for the List of Pictures, 1894.

9 1/4 X 7 3/4 inches.

Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Fogg Art Museum,

Harvard University, Massachusetts.

FIGURE 15.

Aubrey Beardsley, John and Salomé, 1894.

Property of Brian Reade, London.

FIGURE 16.

Aubrey Beardsley, Salomé on Settle, 1894.

Property of Brian Reade, London.

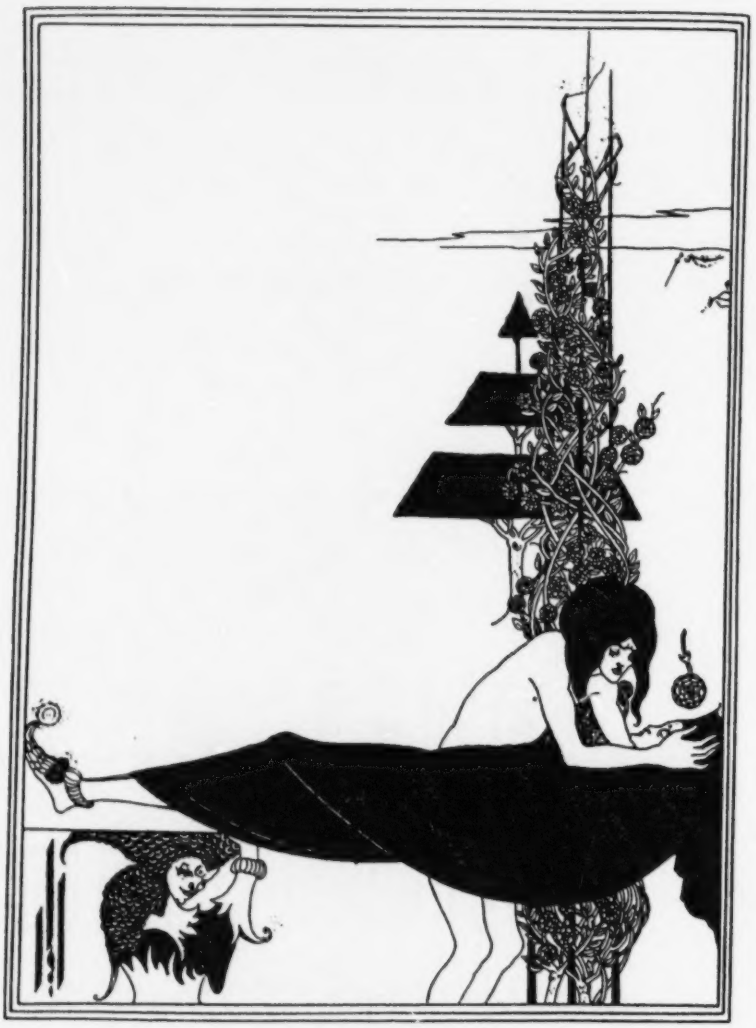

FIGURE 17.

Aubrey Beardsley, A Platonic Lament, 1894.

Property of Brian Reade, London.

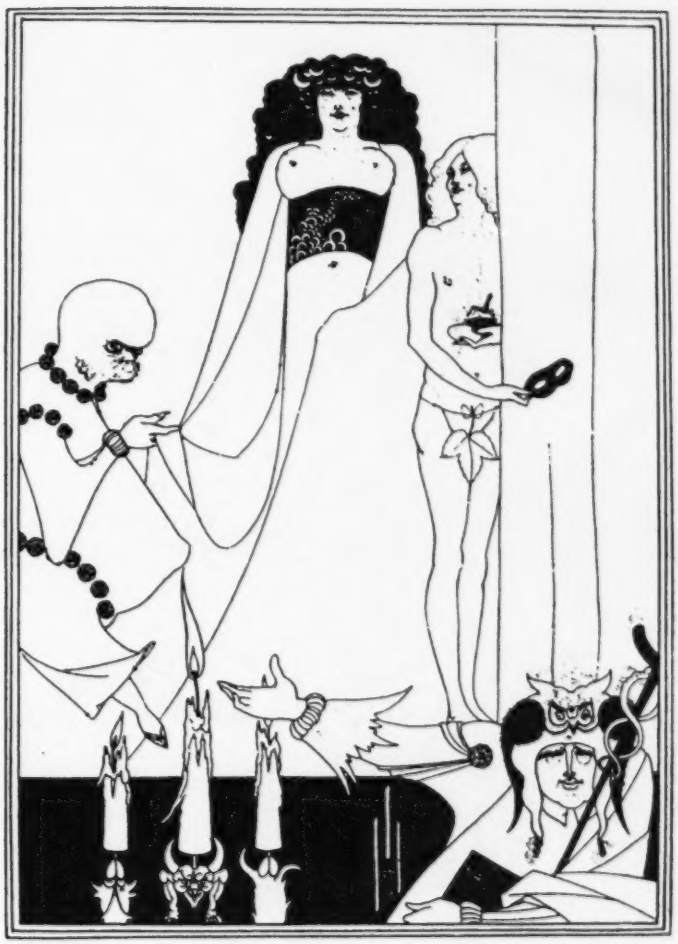

FIGURE 18.

Aubrey Beardsley, Enter Herodias (expurgated), 1894.

Pen and ink.

Los Angeles, County Museum of Art.

FIGURE 19.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Toilette of Salomé II, 1894.

Pen & ink, 8 13/16 X 6 5/16 inches.

British Museum, London.

FIGURE 20.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Dancer's Reward, 1894.

8 3/4 X 6 1/4 inches.

Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Fogg Art Museum,

Harvard University, Massachusetts.

FIGURE 21.

Aubrey Beardsley, The Burial of Salomé, 1894.

6 7/16 X 6 3/4 inches.

Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Fogg Art Museum,

Harvard University, Massachusetts.

FIGURE 22.

Gustave Moreau, Salomé dansant devant Hérode, 1876.

Oil, 60 5/8 X 41 1/16 inches.

Armand Hammer Foundation.

FIGURE 23.

Gustave Moreau, L'Apparition, 1876.

Watercolour, 41 3/8 X 28 3/8 inches.

Louvre Museum, Paris.

FIGURE 24.

Henri Regnault, Salomé, 1869.

Gift of George F. Baker, 1916,

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

FIGURE 25.

Anonymous

Advertisement for Pears' Soap.

(Sir John Millais, Bubbles, 1886).

A BEAUTIFUL COMPLEXION.
Keeps the SKIN COOL and REFRESHED during the HOTTEST WEATHER, and Imparts that SOFT VELVETY FEELING which is so delightful.
If applied after visiting Heated Apartments, Tennis Playing, Walking, Yachting, &c., it will be found DELIGHTFULLY COOLING and REFRESHING, and will remove all HEAT and IRRITATION.
BEETHAMS
GLYCERINE CUCUMBER &c
ENTIRELY REMOVES and PREVENTS all SUNBURN, TAN, REDNESS, ROUGHNESS, &c., and preserves the SKIN from the effects of the HOT SUN, WIND, HARD WATER, and INFERIOR SOAPS more effectually than any other preparation.
A little applied daily after washing will keep the SKIN SOFT and BLOOMING all the Year Round.
BOTTLES, 1s., 2s. 6d., of all CHEMISTS and PERFUMERS. Free for 3d. Extra by the Sole Makers.
M. BEETHAM & SONS, CHEMISTS, CHELTENHAM.

FIGURE 26.

Anonymous

Advertisement for Beethams' Glycerine and Cucumber.

Cools and refreshes the face and hands during hot weather; removes and prevents tan, sunburn, freckles, redness of the skin; soothes insect stings, irritation of the skin, &c., and renders the skin soft, fair, and delicate. Bottles, 4s. 6d. and 8s. 6d; Half-sized Bottles, 2s. 3d.

Ask anywhere for ROWLANDS' KALYDOR.

FIGURE 27.

Anonymous

Advertisement for Rowlands' Kalydor.

"Mama, shall I have beautiful long hair like you when I grow up?"
"Certainly, my dear, if you use **'Edwards' Harlene'**"

FIGURE 28.

Anonymous

Advertisement for Edwards' Harlene.

FIGURE 29.

Anonymous

Advertisement for Pears' Soap.

FIGURE 30.

Anonymous

Advertisement for 'Alexandra' Dentifrice.

FIGURE 31.

Edvard Munch, Vampire, 1893-1894.

35 3/4 X 43 inches.

Oslo Municipal Collections.

FIGURE 32.

Dudley Hardy, "Dis Donc !", 1894.

Published in To-Day 2 (Saturday, February 10, 1894), frontispiece.

FIGURE 33.

Anonymous

Advertisement for Beecham's Pills.

FIGURE 34.

Edward Burne-Jones, The Depths of the Sea, 1887.

Gouache, 77 X 29 inches.

Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.